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GNOSTICISM AND MODERNITY: AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE  
INFLUENCE OF VALENTINIAN GNOSTICISM ON MODERN SYSTEMS OF  
THOUGHT THROUGH THE THEOLOGICAL THEME OF SOPHIOLOGY

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates the influence of second century Gnosticism (Valentinian Gnosticism) on modern systems of thought. It contends that such an influence does exist and that Gnosticism, although often neglected, is one significant hermeneutical approach to understanding influential modern philosophical and theological cultures such as German Idealism and Sophiology. It attempts to demonstrate these claims by broadly adhering to a Foucauldian archaeological methodology that focuses on the historical development of a particular theological theme: Sophiology.

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## **Introduction**

### **Gnosticism in Modernity**

This thesis is a study of the theological and philosophical influence of Valentinian Gnosticism during the modern period. The contention that a marginalized second-century Christian ‘heresy’, such as Gnosticism is typically considered to be, could have exerted any great influence over modern systems of thought may appear peculiar within a ‘standard’ discourse concerning the history of ideas. Yet even today, philosophers as popular and prolific as Slavoj Žižek appeal to ancient Gnostic cosmology to interpret and philosophically represent the insights of modern scientific discourses such as quantum physics concerning the origins of the universe.<sup>1</sup> The argument that Gnostic thought forms pervades modernity has maintained a steady, even if peripheral position within theological, philosophical, historical and political discourses, since the beginning of the eighteenth century. Three figures in particular: Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792-1860), Eric Voegelin (1901-1985), and Cyril O’Regan (b.1952) have strongly insisted on this specific reading of modernity, devoting large parts, and in some cases, all of their academic careers at attempting to persuade others of its legitimacy. Their reasons and motives are varied, but all insist on the significance of the argument itself, which is never doubted. Before introducing the specific tasks and aims of this thesis, it would prove prudent to first familiarize the reader with the historical context from which these questions have emerged, before going on to assess their continuity and divergence with the original contributions of this thesis itself.

To begin such an account, it is necessary to first take note of the contributions of Ferdinand Christian Baur, who in many respects, must be considered the pioneer of this hermeneutical approach, influencing nearly all of his modern counterparts.

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<sup>1</sup> Žižek consistently draws parallels between the Gnostic doctrine of the finite world falling into existence from a pre-existent whole to quantum theories such as ‘broken symmetry theory’ where the universe is said to fall into existence through the bifurcation of a previously homologous symmetrical state. On this point see: Slavoj Žižek, *Event: Philosophy in Transit*, London, Penguin, pp.33-56; Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism*, London, Verso, 2014, pp.389-394; Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, Verso, London, 2012, pp.905-63.

## **F.C. Baur**

Ferdinand Christian Baur was Professor of theology at Tübingen University from 1829 until his death in 1860; an eminent historian, biblical exegete and theologian who founded the Tübingen School of theology. He has authored significant historical expositions of a variety of New Testament texts and produced detailed studies on the history of Christian doctrine. However, he remains today a somewhat neglected and forgotten theologian.<sup>2</sup> He is discussed here, not so much for his contributions to biblical studies or historical theology, but rather, for his unique stance in history as a modern and self-proclaimed *Gnostic* patterned on second-century Christian Gnosticism. However, this is not all. In Baur's fascinating attempts to reconstruct a modern Gnostic philosophy and theology, he also draws on contemporaneous sources to himself that he interpreted to be modern representatives and incarnations, albeit in a developed form, of second-century Gnostic speculation. Three highly statured figures in particular are enlisted to Baur's cause: Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854), Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). All of whom, according to Baur, should be read as modern Gnostics. Therefore, Baur's significance in this respect is not only that he himself is attempting to reproduce and develop ideas inherent in second-century Gnosticism, but, furthermore, that he also highlights instances in modern theology and philosophy where this has already occurred.

Baur's theological project, as will become clear, is greatly indebted to Hegelian and Schellingian philosophy. It receives its greatest exposition in his 1835 *Die christliche Gnosis oder die christliche Religions-Philosophie in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (Christian Gnosis or Christian philosophy of religion in its historical development). Baur provides a concise and useful summary of the purposes of this endeavor in the beginning of *Die christliche Gnosis*:

*Eine Geschichte der Religions-philosophie, an welcher es bisher noch immer gefehlt hat, ist nach mei, ner Ansicht nicht möglich, ohne daß man auf die Er scheinungen zurückgeht, die die alte Gnosis auf ihrem so fruchtbaren Boden erzeugt hat: hat man sich aber einmal dieses Standpuncts in seinem ganzen Umfange bemächtigt, und mit dem Begriff der Gnosis auch den Begriff der Religions- Philosophie gewonnen, so eröffnet sich von diesem Standpuncte aus sogleich auch der Vlik auf eine zusammenhängende Reihe gleichartiger Erscheinungen, in*

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<sup>2</sup> The only major English study on Baur is P.C. Hodgson, *The Formation of Historical Theology: A Study of Ferdinand Christian Baur*, New York, 1966.

welchen derselbe Begriff durch den innern Zusammenhang seiner Entwicklungs- Momente sich fortbewegt.<sup>3</sup>

It appears then that Baur believes that there is a ‘concept’ of Gnosis inherent and first developed within second-century Gnosticism that nevertheless transcends this specific historical manifestation and further develops and evolves into later systems of thought that can be documented, analyzed and traced through historical and structural study. Baur will eventually conclude that Hegel’s posthumously published *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* were the most developed form of ‘Gnosis.’ Why is Baur concerned with tracing the concept of Gnosis through its historical evolution? This is perhaps best answered when conceptualizing Baur’s theology as a form of theological Hegelianism as Johannes Zachhuber illustrates:

Baur’s presentation of his own task in *Die christliche Gnosis* hints at the presence of Hegelian principles in the very methodology of his investigation. As a historical phenomenon, gnosis can only be adequately grasped if individual events and facts are understood as moments of a self-moving (and in this sense, as Baur says at this point, ‘living’) concept.<sup>4</sup>

One can identify in Hegel’s *Lectures* the movement of the abstract concept of religion, in theistic terms, God as a mere abstraction of thought that one sees, according to Hegel, in ‘the Jewish God’ or Brahma in Hinduism,<sup>5</sup> through its self-determination in consummate religion which must:

Pass through these determinacies in order to attain from them the nature of its concept or to objectify its concept in the form of representation. For these determinacies are the moments, the becoming of the concept, and their resolution and the return to itself are what constitute the concept itself.<sup>6</sup>

According to Hegel, ‘it belongs to the nature of the concept, its vitality and becoming, in fact its spirituality, that it does not exist at the beginning.’<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in the *Science of Logic* Hegel

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<sup>3</sup> Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Die christliche Gnosis oder die christliche Religions-Philosophie in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, Tübingen, 1835, p.viii (A history of the philosophy of religion, which until now has been missing, is in my view, not possible, without returning to the phenomena engendered by ancient Gnosis on its fertile ground. Once one has embraced this point of departure and captured the concept of Gnosis alongside the concept of the philosophy of religion, immediately opens up a coherent series of similar phenomena in which the same concept moves forward because of the internal relationship of the moments of its development).

<sup>4</sup> Johannes Zachhuber, *Theology as Science in Nineteenth-Century Germany: From F.C. Baur to Ernst Troeltsch*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, pp.29-30.

<sup>5</sup> G.W.F Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion I: Introduction and the Concept of Religion*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p.331.

<sup>6</sup> G.W.F Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion II: Determinate Religion*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p.94.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

begins with pure being which is akin to pure nothing,<sup>8</sup> insofar as both are completely lacking in determination, which must then, through the movement of the dialectic, become or determine itself concretely before culminating with it becoming conscious of itself as its own process of self-determination in absolute knowing;<sup>9</sup> so likewise, the concept of religion, or God, passes through its own moments of self-determination before finally, after the death of Christ, the community of spirit is born, which is now able to grasp and become ‘conscious of the eternal history, the eternal movement, which God himself is’<sup>10</sup>, where the Christian community is ‘itself the existing Spirit, the Spirit in its existence, *God existing as community*.’<sup>11</sup>

One can identify a very similar conception in Schelling’s *System of Transcendental Idealism*, where he conceives of history as a progressive revelation of God, which can only culminate in the completion of the historical process in which God’s self-consciousness is realized.<sup>12</sup> Baur perceives Schelling to be an advocate of ancient Gnosticism insofar as his teleological conception of God, disclosing himself within history and gradually moving towards his own self-consciousness, mimics Baur’s own conception of Gnosis.

Baur acknowledges himself that both Hegel’s *Lectures* and Schelling’s *System* exerted a considerable influence over his own theological project,<sup>13</sup> although Hegel clearly takes precedence here.

According to Baur, second-century Gnosticism is the first attempt to grasp and extract the single concept of religion existing within its three major proponents: Judaism, Christianity, and paganism.<sup>14</sup> This is what Gnosis represents to Baur ‘the philosophy of religion in the sense that it aims at a philosophical penetration of the history of religion, and thus at achieving a concept of

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<sup>8</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (1812), New York, Prometheus, 1999, p.82.

<sup>9</sup> This point is neatly summarized by Hegel himself at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: ‘The goal, Absolute Knowing, or Spirit that knows itself as Spirit, has for its path the recollection of the Spirits as they are in themselves and as they accomplish the organization of their realm. Their preservation, regarded from the side of their free existence appearing in the form of contingency, is history; but regarded from the side of their comprehended organization, is the science of knowing’ (G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, p.493).

<sup>10</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion III: The Consummate Religion*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 327

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.331 (my emphasis).

<sup>12</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 2001, p.206.

<sup>13</sup> Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Briefe, Teil I: Die frühen Briefe (1814-1835)* (Ed: Carl Hester), Thorbecke, 1993, pp.26-27.

<sup>14</sup> Baur, *Die christliche Gnosis*, p.19.

religion through comparative study of religions.’<sup>15</sup> In turn, this concept is considered by Baur to be, in its completed form, the absolute religion. Thus, Baur’s entire systematic theology can be read as an attempt of the religious concept or Gnosis to grasp itself in its own historical development through various manifestations in particular religions, finally acknowledging this as its own history of becoming, this awareness is for Baur, the philosophy of religion, and it is why Hegel’s lectures, on the same topic, are considered to be its grandest articulation and ‘in the final instance...philosophy of religion can consistently only be articulated as a theory of absolute Spirit’, or as the progressive self-revelation of God<sup>16</sup>:

*Daher ist ihr die Religionsgeschichte nicht bloß die Geschichte der göttlichen Offenbarungen, sondern diese Offenbarungen sind zugleich der Entwicklungsproceß, in welchem das ewige Wesen der Gottheit selbst aus sich herausgeht, sich in einer endlichen Welt manifestirt und sich mit sich selbst entzweit, um durch diese Manifestation und Selbstentzweiung zur ewigen Einheit mit sich selbst zurückzukehren.*<sup>17</sup>

One can find nearly identical passages in Hegel’s *Lectures*,<sup>18</sup> where he also, interestingly enough, notes its similarities to ancient Gnosticism.<sup>19</sup> Despite second-century Gnosticism being the archetype of Gnosis and Baur’s own project, it does not represent the completed form of the philosophy of religion, as Baur would conceive it, given the docetic tendencies of Gnostic Christology. Baur argues that in this case, an inherent dualism remains within the concept of religion, whereas in the absolute religion all such dualisms would have been resolved. It is this very lacuna, still existing after Baur’s historical study of ancient Gnosticism, which prompts him to search for the concept of Gnosis amongst his contemporaries in a more developed form.

The first to receive his attention is Schleiermacher, where he devotes an entire section, in his *Die Christliche Gnosis*, to Schleiermacher’s *Glaubenslehre*. According to Baur’s rather unorthodox reading of Schleiermacher, his theology should be conceived as a philosophy of religion that has been dominated by subjectivity. Baur interprets Schleiermacher’s emphasis on the ‘feeling of absolute dependence’ as a consciousness that has, in itself, had an historical

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<sup>15</sup> Zachhuber, *Theology as Science*, p.32.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p.33.

<sup>17</sup> Baur, *Die christliche Gnosis*, p.22 (Therefore, the history of religion is not simply the history of divine revelations, but these revelations are at the same time the developing process in which the eternal essence of divinity goes outside of itself, manifesting itself in a finite world, dividing itself from itself, so that by this manifestation and self-division it may return to its eternal unity with itself).

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance: Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion I*, p.307, p.323.

<sup>19</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: III*, p.287.

development through various stages of universal history, and particularly in the history of religion, which culminates in the Christian faith. Baur believes this to be a related project to his own systematic theology of Gnosis, which fails to act as its proponent only insofar as it is too subjective, only a ‘theory of interior religious experience without the potential to explain the relationship between this experience and the historical social and cultural dimensions of religion.’<sup>20</sup> The latter of which he recognizes in Hegel’s philosophy of religion, where he argues that Hegel has successfully defined the concept of religion, beyond Schleiermacher’s subjectivity, as ‘*das Selbstbewusstsein Gottes oder des absoluten Geistes sei, oder die Idee des Geistes, der sich zu sich selbst verhält, die Beziehung des Geistes auf den absoluten Geist, das Wissen des göttlichen Geistes von sich.*’<sup>21</sup> However, as Zachhuber has perceptively pointed out, there is a certain inevitability to Baur reaching this conclusion, given the fact that ‘the plausibility of this teleology, of course, is partly due to Baur’s own original definition of gnosis, which had made its fulfillment in Hegel nearly inevitable – not least because it was (as Baur himself confessed) formulated under Hegel’s philosophical influence and guidance.’<sup>22</sup> Thus Baur is attempting to present the absolute religion as a form of faith perfectly translated into secure knowledge. This, of course, is Hegel’s own aim in his philosophy of religion: ‘we should *know* God *cognitively*, God’s nature and essence, and should esteem this cognition above all else.’<sup>23</sup> However, although Hegel’s philosophy was meant to complete Baur’s conception of Gnosis, he still detects latent problems existing within Hegel’s philosophy of religion, concerning the distinction between history as subjectively conceived, and history in its objective reality. For Hegel, it is only required that Christ is the God-man for faith or *for consciousness*, as a passing moment in the concept’s road to self-knowledge. However, for Baur, this is not enough, history as it is for consciousness and as it is in reality must be synonymous and proved to be so, otherwise the latent dualism existing within ancient Gnosticism would have haunted Hegel’s philosophy of religion and his own endeavors at this same project. These tensions are never fully resolved in Baur’s systematic theology.

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<sup>20</sup> Zachhuber, *Theology as Science*, p.42.

<sup>21</sup> Baur, *Die christliche Gnosis*, pp.672-3 (the self-consciousness of God or of the absolute Spirit, or of the idea of the Spirit, in relationship to itself, the relationship of the Spirit to the absolute Spirit, self-knowledge of the divine Spirit).

<sup>22</sup> Zachhuber, *Theology as Science*, p.42.

<sup>23</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: I*, p.88.



The end to which this analysis has served is to have documented the first explicit attempt of a modern theologian to consciously and deliberately reproduce a Gnostic theology. However, perhaps more importantly, it shows that Baur was the first theologian to interpret and acknowledge the importance of Gnosticism as a hermeneutical aid to understanding modern philosophical and theological movements as significant as Hegelianism. The accuracy and perceptiveness of Baur's claims, along with their methodological appropriateness shall be discussed later, however it is simply important to note, at this introductory stage that, at least according to Baur, second-century Gnosticism has had a pervasive influence within modernity. This contention would inspire a later political philosopher, named Eric Voegelin, to apply this analysis to twentieth century politics, which shall now be accounted for.

### **Eric Voegelin**

Voegelin, born in Cologne, established the beginning of his successful academic career teaching political theory and sociology at the University of Vienna. Voegelin actively opposed the Nazi regime, publishing numerous books and articles between 1933 and 1938 criticizing Nazi politics. His political activism forced him to flee Austria after the *Anschluss* in 1938. He settled in North America, where he subsequently attained a teaching post at Louisiana State University in 1942. In 1958 he was offered, what was formerly, Max Weber's (1864-1920) prestigious chair in political science in Munich at Ludwig's- Maximilian University, where he established the institute for political science. He returned to North America to teach at Stanford University in 1969, where he remained until his death. Voegelin is perhaps best known for his five-volume *magnum opus: Order and History*. However, he features here, primarily because, like Baur before him, he is considered to be the second most notable figure to contend that ancient Gnosticism exercises a significant and fundamental influence over modernity.

Voegelin outlines this, his central thesis, in two major works: *The New Science of Politics* (1952) and *Science, Politics and Gnosticism* (1968). Drawing on Baur, and two influential works by Hans Jonas (1903-1993) and Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) respectively,<sup>24</sup> Voegelin argues, in the words of Ellis Sandoz, that:

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<sup>24</sup> Hans Jonas critically compared ancient Gnosticism to modern existentialism (particularly Martin Heidegger) (see: Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1958, pp.320-40); while Hans Urs von Balthasar explored

There is both an historical continuity and an experiential equivalence between the ancient movements [Gnosticism] and such modern phenomena as positivism, Marxism, Freudianism, existentialism, progressivism, utopianism, revolutionary activism, fascism, communism [and] National Socialism.<sup>25</sup>

Whilst clearly adopting and extending Baur's original argument, Voegelin has no intention of attempting a positive reconstruction of this ancient Christian 'heresy.' To the contrary, he perceives his philosophy to be a highly deconstructive enterprise which attempts to expose, criticize, and ultimately reverse the prevalence of modern Gnosticism; playing the role of a modern Ireneaus, for the simple reason that he believes that much of what is bad in modern politics (principally totalitarianism in all of its forms, although especially in its Nazi and Communist manifestations) is the result of modernity's association with ancient Gnosticism.

Vogelin outlines a six-fold criteria that he believes underlies both the 'experiential' conditions of ancient Gnosticism and much of modern philosophy and politics. Firstly, (1) 'the gnostic is dissatisfied with his situation'<sup>26</sup> and, furthermore, that (2) 'the drawbacks of this situation can be attributed to the fact that the world is intrinsically poorly organized.'<sup>27</sup> Thirdly, (3) that salvation from this unsatisfactory world is possible, and (4) within the powers of human activity.<sup>28</sup> Subsequently, (5) 'from this follows the belief that the order of being will have to be changed in an historical process'<sup>29</sup> involving human action. And, finally, (6) 'it becomes the task of the gnostic to seek out the prescription for such a change. Knowledge – gnosis – of the method of altering being is the central concern of the gnostic...as well as the Gnostic's readiness to come forward as a prophet who will proclaim his knowledge about the salvation of mankind.'<sup>30</sup> Although Voegelin explicitly states that he believes that a 'direct connection' between ancient Gnosticism and modern Gnosticism does actually exist, he never fully elucidates this point with

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the place of 'Gnosticism' within German Idealism (see: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*: I, Kerle, 1947).

<sup>25</sup> Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, Washington, Regnery, 1968, p.xi.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.59.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.60.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

exhaustive historical study; he appears to take it for granted.<sup>31</sup> He exerts much of his efforts comparing the ‘experiential’ continuities between ancient and modern Gnosticism.

The two key terms which Voegelin invokes repetitively throughout his attempts at experiential comparisons are ‘immanentization’ and the formulation of a ‘second reality’;<sup>32</sup> two Gnostic themes that directly contradict Voegelin’s own commitment to his understanding of Augustinian Christianity. According to Voegelin, ‘human nature does not find its fulfillment in this world, but only in the *visio beatifica*, in supernatural perfection through grace in death. Since, therefore, there is no fulfillment in this world, Christian life on earth takes its special form from the life to come in the next.’<sup>33</sup> However, within the modern Gnostic system, transcendence, both in the sense of human fulfillment and divine existence, is rejected and ‘immanentized’, which leaves two pivotal conclusions: humanity is divinized in God’s place, and the world is then viewed as the domain of human creating; the old unsatisfactory world can be discarded, and those alternative ‘second realities’ may be fashioned in its place. Voegelin lists a whole variety of thinkers and movements that he believes can be characterized by these Gnostic tendencies: Hegel,<sup>34</sup> Schelling, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Auguste Comte (1798-1857), Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Adolf Hitler (1889-1945), to give only a sample.<sup>35</sup>

It is beyond both the scope and the purpose of this analysis to offer a detailed account of each of Voegelin’s assessments of individual Gnostic thinkers. However, to illustrate his point, Marx can be taken as an example, following Voegelin’s own six-fold criteria. According to Voegelin, Marx is a ‘speculative Gnostic’ in the tradition of Hegel. He rejects any transcendent reality in favor of a divinized and absolute world. However, the world, as Marx experiences it, is incomplete and unsatisfactory. Marx, the one ‘in the know’ or the Gnostic, produces a ‘second reality’ an ideal world that should replace the current one; a world in which the communist ideals

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<sup>31</sup> He states: ‘on the historical continuity of Gnosticism from antiquity to modern times, let it be said here only that the connections in the development of gnostic sects from those of the eastern Mediterranean in antiquity through the movements of the high Middle Ages up to those of the Western Renaissance and Reformation have been sufficiently clarified to permit us to speak of a continuity’ (Ibid, p.59).

<sup>32</sup> Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987, p.169.

<sup>33</sup> Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, p.61.

<sup>34</sup> Voegelin pays a lot of attention to the ‘Gnostic’ tendencies in Hegel the ‘greatest of speculative Gnostics’ (see also Eric Voegelin, *Order and History, V: In Search of Order*, Rouge, Baton, 1987; Eric Voegelin, ‘On Hegel: A Study in Sorcery’, in: Eric Voegelin, *Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, XII: Published Essays (1966-1985)*, Rouge, Baton, 1990).

<sup>35</sup> Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, p.124.

are perfectly realized. As the conceiver of this 'second reality', Marx naturally fulfils the role of the Gnostic prophet announcing the salvific knowledge of this new world. Any attempt to introduce transcendence into Marx's new world and into the conditions of his thinking that permit him to formulate it, is rejected on the grounds that it would be a metaphysical abstraction, although Voegelin argues that it is because it would fashion the possibility of criticizing and questioning Marx; something that no Gnostic will allow. The opprobrious political consequences of this Gnostic trait are highlighted by Voegelin:

The prohibition of questions is not harmless, for it has attained great social effectiveness among men who forbid themselves to ask questions in critical situations. One thinks of the observation of Rudolf Höss, the commandant of the extermination camp at Auschwitz. When asked why he did not refuse to obey the order to organize the mass executions, he replied: 'At that time I did not indulge in deliberation: I had received the order, and I had to carry it out...I do not believe that even one of the thousands of SS leaders could have permitted such a thought to occur to him. Something like that was just completely impossible.' This is very close to the wording of Marx's declaration that for 'socialist man' such a question becomes a 'practical impossibility.'<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, in Voegelin's analysis, the consequences of Gnostic immanentization and the fashioning of ideal 'second realities' leads directly to tyrannical and despotic ideologies and institutions. This conception of the 'cause' of totalitarian ideologies has recently found support in the ethics of Alain Badiou's philosophy.<sup>37</sup>

At times, Voegelin's thesis can appear somewhat overstated, and the lens with which he views modernity can appear somewhat narrow, something that Voegelin acknowledged himself later in life.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Voegelin never appears to explicitly consider some of the possible political ramifications of his own 'Augustinian' alternative to modern Gnosticism. Namely, that one must

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<sup>36</sup> Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, p.18.

<sup>37</sup> More recently, Alain Badiou has offered a similar theory regarding the origin of totalitarian ideologies. Within Badiou's ontology, what exists is an infinity of pure multiples. Within this flux, 'situations' come into being which determine that a particular set of multiples be related and named e.g. a set of prime numbers. An 'event' occurs fleetingly within a situation and constructs around its center a new way of being; a new way of relating that is constituted by this particular event; for instance, the subject 'Paul' after the event of the encounter on the road to Damascus. According to Badiou, an event names a void within the situation: 'we might say that since a situation is composed by the knowledges circulating within it, the event names the void inasmuch as it names the not-known of the situation. To take a well-known example: Marx is an event for political thought because he designates, under the name 'proletariat', the central void of early bourgeois societies' (Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, London, Verso, 2012, p.69). Totalitarianism emerges when the event is not taken to name the void, in which no particular multiple can hold sway, but is understood to designate a substance on which the situation can rest. This then gives rise to the belief in the substance being represented by a particular group or race and leads to political tyranny. Badiou argues that this was a key factor in the growth of the Nazi party.

<sup>38</sup> Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, Rouge, Baton, 1996, pp.66-7.

simply accept the legitimacy of the established Christian order, seemingly also without question and without the possibility of political change, and trust that its inherent transcendence will save the representatives of its power from political totalitarianism. The thought that this established order may have already been infiltrated by, and indeed perhaps the product of, or even the design constructed to retain, one particular social or political group's power is never really acknowledged. The possibility of some of Voegelin's own critiques being appropriate to his own political vision is never addressed by Voegelin.

Nevertheless, Voegelin's political philosophy has demonstrated the possible significance of ancient Christian Gnosticism for understanding modernity; he has drastically extended Baur's original insights to incorporate a reading of an entire period of history through its lens. For Voegelin, whether one agrees with his analysis or not, there is no doubt that most of his life's work can be summarized as a call 'to recognize the essence of modernity as the growth of Gnosticism';<sup>39</sup> a powerful statement that should give any interpreter of modern philosophy and politics pause for thought, as to the significance of Gnosticism as not necessarily *the*, as it is for Voegelin, but at least *a* hermeneutical approach to modernity.

Both Baur and Voegelin provide the inspiration and direction for the next theologian to be discussed: Cyril O'Regan, who in many respects can be considered to focus and methodologically substantiate the claims of the earlier thinkers.

### **Cyril O'Regan**

Cyril O'Regan, acclaimed Hegel scholar and theologian, initially adopts and focuses the arguments of Baur and Voegelin to support his hermeneutical approach to reading Hegel, which he outlines in his book *The Heterodox Hegel* (1994). In essence, he accepts and wishes to substantiate the core thesis advocated by both Baur and Voegelin, that Hegel is best understood when contextualized within a Gnostic framework. However, despite sharing the central argument of both thinkers, he evidences serious doubts concerning their methodology, especially the broadness of their use of the term 'Gnosticism.' He criticizes Voegelin stating that:

Where Voegelin accuses Hegel of being gnostic, the term seems to denote knowledge, knowledge of the reality of God, world, and human being and history and their relation, where

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<sup>39</sup> Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, p.126.

knowledge is absolute and divine rather than relative and human. Employed in this way the term does not evoke, in any tangible way, Gnosticism as a discernible historical phenomenon of the early centuries of the Common Era. More of a relationship is implied when Voegelin suggests that gnosis as a superlative form of knowledge carries soteriological freight, for it is clearly a characteristic of Gnosticism that it is knowledge rather than ethical behavior, that accounts for salvation. But, of course, this characteristic is, in itself, insufficient to distinguish Gnosticism from other religious systems.<sup>40</sup>

O'Regan argues that Baur, on the other hand, has grounded his use of the term Gnosticism on a solid historical platform:

The case is different in Baur's magisterial *Die christliche Gnosis* (1835). Employment of 'gnostic' in that text is tied firmly to the various esoteric systems of the first centuries...When Baur speaks, therefore, of Hegelian ontotheology being gnostic, he is using the term in a much more determinate way and setting more definitive criteria of employment than that offered by Voegelin.<sup>41</sup>

However, despite O'Regan's admiration for Baur's approach, he still suggests that amendments are required which would tightly regulate the application of the term Gnosticism to modern systems of thought, grounding this description in meticulous historical and structural study and concrete comparisons:

Methodological amendment of Baur's use of gnostic with respect to Hegelian ontotheology and other modern religious philosophies...would take the form of a selection of a quite specific Gnostic system, in this case the Valentinian Gnostic system, and testing whether Hegelian theologoumena provoke comparison with Valentinian depictions of the divine realm, creation, evil, etc.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, O'Regan makes significant adaptations to Baur's method, and with this, he acknowledges, to a much greater and realistic degree, the influence of non-Gnostic systems of thought on Hegel's philosophy, for instance: Lutheranism, Jacob Boehme's philosophy, mysticism, etc. It is important to note that O'Regan is by no means understating the significance of Gnosticism's influence on modernity in contrast to Baur and Voegelin, he is simply contesting that it is one of the important hermeneutical approaches to Hegel's philosophy, as opposed to the only correct approach. If there was any doubt of this, O'Regan makes his position emphatically clear that his 'working hypothesis, which corroborates and further specifies a thesis advanced as early as 1835,

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<sup>40</sup> Cyril O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, New York, SUNY, 1994, p.19.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p.20.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

is that Hegelian ontotheology does, in fact, repeat or recapitulate depictions that are uniquely Valentinian.<sup>43</sup>

O'Regan highlights several instances where he believes such a connection can be explicitly realized. Firstly, both Hegel and the Gnostics assume, contrary to patristic and scholastic theology, that God in himself can be known cognitively: 'Hegel loudly insists that the thesis of the non-cognizability of God to have no foundation in Christianity.'<sup>44</sup> O'Regan further argues that Hegel's Trinitarian theology is markedly Gnostic in character:

Almost all of Hegel's Trinitarian appeals are non-standard; but the appeal to the Gnostics in the context of an attempt to justify and re-appropriate the Christian dogma of the Trinity is not only non-standard but truly extraordinary, Basilides and...general forms of Valentinian Gnosticism appear to be gestured to in Hegel's evocation. Hegel focuses upon the Abyss as the Propater (Forefather) or Proarchia (Pre-beginning) and the generation of Monogenes (First-born). Monogenes appears to interest Hegel in a particular way, since Monogenes is the revealer of the Forefather, from Hegel's point of view this appears to establish that, the negative determination of the Abyss notwithstanding, the immanent divine reality is a matrix of revelation.<sup>45</sup>

O'Regan also suggests that Hegel's understanding of the doctrine of creation and the fall to be synonymous events, further illustrates his conformity to Gnostic creation narratives.<sup>46</sup> This proposal is more clearly identified in Hegel's reading of the serpent in the Genesis narrative.

O'Regan argues that:

The real hermeneutical precedent for the positive reading of knowledge, even in its fallen situation, and the accompanying strange affirmation of the serpent, is to be found in Gnosticism. Knowledge may be a pathogenic agent insofar as it alienates, yet it is also the soteriological agent par excellence, and the serpent, for Hegel, is clearly in the service of knowledge and is instrumental in revealing its possession to the not yet fully self-conscious spiritual beings. Moreover, Hegel is also more nearly Gnostic in the consistency with which he interprets the serpent image.<sup>47</sup>

These are just a few of the examples that O'Regan explores. At this early stage, his thesis is consigned to reading aspects of Hegelian philosophy as Gnostic. However, in his later publications he attempts to extend this thesis, arguing that large tenets of modernity could also perhaps be read as being deeply influenced by Gnosticism, he suggests figures in literature, such

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p.30.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p.134.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p.143.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p.163.

as William Blake (1757-1827), and in modern theology, like Jürgen Moltmann (b.1926) and Paul Tillich (1886-1965). However, these suggestions, to date, have not been substantiated by the scholarly publications that O'Regan had initially envisaged.

In *Gnostic Return in Modernity* (2001) O'Regan outlines his methodological adaptations to Baur's genealogy. As has already been noted, O'Regan criticised Baur's proposals for evidencing several methodological flaws. Most importantly, Baur failed to adopt a concrete 'criteriology,' within his genealogy, for identifying Gnostic discourses which, like the conveniently invented term 'Hinduism' can be so broad that they become hermeneutically vacuous. Thus, Baur failed to produce a method for tightly regulating and defining his use of the term 'Gnosticism;' which is demonstrated in the fact that he would often conflate it with other narratives such as Neoplatonism.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, his genealogy would often be based on loose associations with very little demonstrative evidence to support his case. O'Regan, in identifying the limitations of Baur's approach, but also praising his insights, develops his own methodology for genealogical excavation. One of his most significant alterations occurs with his production of a concrete 'criteriology' for the term Gnosticism, which he accomplishes through his identification of a regulative 'depth narrative grammar' which he suggests underlies *every* discourse. A narrative grammar is fundamentally a set of regulative norms and primary points that are fundamental to a specific discourse; underpinning and directing it and allowing us to identify it as discourse...*x*. O'Regan argues, in the wake of Noam Chomsky and Hans Jonas, that one can identify and distinguish between a discourse's 'depth grammar' and its 'surface grammar.'<sup>49</sup> If we take O'Regan's own example, in the instance of Valentinian Gnosticism, he claims that one is able to identify a prevalent depth grammar which is committed to, just to name several examples, a *creatio ex Deo*, an a-historical cosmic fall within the divine itself, an opprobrious acknowledgement of finitude as an accidental product of the fall, and an eschatological return of the fallen divine principle back within the divine Pleroma. These positions, according to O'Regan, are regulative and fundamental to the Valentinian discourse insofar as they dictate the direction of the entire narrative. One could not remove the depth

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<sup>48</sup> Cyril O'Regan, *Gnostic Return in Modernity*, New York, New York State University Press, 2001, pp.4-5.

<sup>49</sup> See: Noam Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics: A Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought* (third edition), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp.78-93; Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, pp.320-40; Cyril O'Regan, *Gnostic Return in Modernity*, p.61.



grammar without irrevocably transforming the discourse into something novel. In contrast, the surface grammar is not fundamental and regulative to the discourse; it can vary, develop, and transform without affecting the narrative as a whole or forcing one to identify it as a new discourse. In the above example, the surface grammar does change frequently, as Irenaeus' (130-202) account of Valentinian Gnosticism demonstrates: for instance, some contended that *Bythus*' original creative agency was solely produced by himself having both male and female generative potentiality. While others argued that he created in collaboration with his feminine counterpart *Sige*.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, according to Irenaeus, certain followers attribute the salvation or restoration of the degenerate Aeon, Sophia, solely to *Bythus*' power: *Horos*, while still others argued that part of her was expelled from the Pleroma and recaptured by Jesus.<sup>51</sup> In both instances, due to the underling depth grammar of the discourse, Irenaeus maintains that both are Valentinian narratives, despite the variation of the surface grammar which, at times, can be quite significant.

Due to the compounded simplicity of every depth narrative grammar, there is a danger of O'Regan merely repeating Buar's mistake in his hermeneutical broadness; after all, other discourses, such as Neoplatonism for instance, could also, perhaps, be identified by the conventions outlined in the Valentinian depth narrative grammar. However, in recognising these inherent dangers, O'Regan suggests that before a depth grammar can be definitively applied to another discourse, one must demonstrate its hermeneutical superiority. In O'Regan's case, he outlines why his proposed Valentinian depth narrative grammar must be identified with Valentinian systems of thought and not, say, Neoplatonic, Apocalyptic, or Kabbalistic ones.

The only instance where O'Regan puts his rigorously constructed methodology to work in actual analysis is in his study of Jacob Boehme's (1575-1624) relationship to Gnosticism in *Gnostic Apocalypse: Jacob Boehme's Haunted Narrative* (2002). Here, O'Regan argues that Boehme is instrumental in introducing Gnostic speculation into modern systems of thought. He has more recently offered further interpretations of Hegel in his *The Anatomy of Misremembering* (2014).

The above analyses have attempted to introduce the reader to the historical context of the central questions that this thesis wishes to explore and how they have been developed and handled in the past. It is now necessary to demonstrate how this thesis intends to explore these

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<sup>50</sup> Irenaeus, 'Against Heresies I:I', in: Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Arthur Coxe (eds and trans), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers I*, London, Cosimo, 2007, pp.309-568, p.316.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p.317.

questions, in what context, using which method to purport the investigation and to outline its uniqueness while still being situated within this historical context.

### **Outline of Scope**

This thesis shares the major contention of all of the above thinkers insofar as each has argued that Gnosticism, as a hermeneutical approach to modern philosophical, theological, and political discourses, remains a significant aspect of their interpretation. However, having acknowledged that fact, it differs quite markedly in its approach and its scope. It proposes to study the influence of Valentinian Gnosticism on modern systems of thought by analyzing and excavating the history of a specific contemporary theological discourse; namely, that of *Sophiology* (theologies that utilize the biblical figure of Wisdom).

The thesis shall attempt to ascertain the extent to which Valentinian Gnosticism has distinctly influenced and informed this current theological discourse. Sophiology, as a central theme within systematic theology, first rose to prominence within the theological writings of three major 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian theologians: Vladimir Solovyov (1853-1900), Pavel Florensky (1882-1937), and Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944). It has been selected by this thesis as a modern theological discussion to be engaged with in relation to its connection to ancient Christian Gnosticism for three reasons. Firstly, as Michel Foucault (1926-1984) has pointed out, an analytical project of this sort must ‘never lose sight of the reference of a concrete example that may serve as a testing ground for the analysis.’<sup>52</sup> This thesis does not attempt to critically engage with theories and ideas abstracted from their historical realities; it seeks to analyze and critically evaluate a specific and concrete theological theme as it has been made manifest in its historical context, so as to assess whether a very tangible embodiment of Valentinian Gnosticism within modern systems of thought can be documented.

The question then to be answered is why has Sophiology been selected as this concrete example? As shall be shown below, Sophiology, from its birth within systematic theology, has been followed by a recurrent suspicion from ecclesiastical hierarchs and theological commentators that its major contentions have been sourced from Gnosticism as opposed to Christian ‘orthodoxy’ as its proponents have claimed. Although these accusations have been

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<sup>52</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Essential Works: Ethics I*, London, Penguin, 1997, p.7.

fairly well voiced, there has never been a comprehensive investigation into the importance of Gnostic thought for Sophiology, or indeed into whether it does in fact exist. Thus, the topic presents itself as a largely fertile area for an investigation of this nature. However, despite its obvious significance for offering a concrete example for an investigation into the influence of Valentinian Gnosticism on modern systems of thought, what may be considered to be its wider significance? In response, one could simply point to its current prevalent and influential status as a theological theme existing within contemporary British systematic theology and, moreover, its capacity to engage, from a theological perspective, with discourses such as contemporary cosmology and ecology. It would appear beneficial at this point to offer a brief interlude, giving an account of the development of Sophiology and its popularity within modern British systematic theology to substantiate the claim of its significance, before setting out the specific questions this thesis wishes to pose to this tradition, and how it will go about doing so.

The figure of Wisdom's route into existing theological debates has been far from straightforward. Although Wisdom was once the first port of call for early Christians engaged in theological speculation, this pattern had slowly declined from about the 4<sup>th</sup> Century. Its absence from Western theological thought is notable; some of the most influential and discussed Western theologians of the last century: Karl Barth, Henri de Lubac (1896-1991), Karl Rahner (1904-1984), Hans Urs Von Balthasar (1905-1988), Jürgen Moltmann (b. 1926), Wolfhart Pannenberg (b.1928) and Eberhard Jüngel (b.1934), for instance, scarcely engage with the figure of Wisdom at all, other than to note its role in previous thinkers,<sup>53</sup> or to acknowledge it as an attribute of God among others.<sup>54</sup> This trend did not extend to Eastern theology, where the figure of Wisdom has enjoyed a substantial amount of attention. However, that being said, its reception within Eastern religious thought has always been marked with tentativeness and caution. This can be seen in Solovyov, Florensky and Bulgakov's native reception.

Vladimir Solovyov's Sophiology was liberally accused and thought of as heretical both, on account of its association with Gnosticism, and his willingness to synthesise occult theories with

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<sup>53</sup> See: Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: a Theological Aesthetic, III – Studies in Lay Styles*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1986, pp.279-353.

<sup>54</sup> See: Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics II,I: The Doctrine of God* (trans: G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance), Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1957.

his own unique mystical experiences.<sup>55</sup> And, almost on the grounds of ‘guilt by association’, the same connotations followed Florensky and Bulgakov’s Sophiological speculations, despite the respective theologies of all three, although related, differing quite substantially from one another. Bulgakov’s own Sophiology was accused of heresy in 1935 in the synod of Karlsbad by Metropolitan (later Patriarch) Sergius of Moscow. The accusations prompted, albeit rather reluctantly given his fondness for Bulgakov, his Bishop, Evlogii, to investigate the charges. The investigation, taken up by a group which included several of Bulgakov’s closest students – Vladimir Lossky (1903-1958) and Georgii Florovsky (1893-1979) being the most distinguished – both of whom felt that Bulgakov’s theology was too deeply influenced by German philosophy and betrayed the ‘Neo-Patristic Synthesis’<sup>56</sup> which was driving their investigations at the time. They believed that they were combatting pantheism and Gnosticism when rejecting Bulgakov’s Sophiological speculation.<sup>57</sup> Their criticism led to the Russian Orthodox Church’s rejection of Bulgakov’s Sophiology in the same year.<sup>58</sup> Andrew Louth typifies the current attitude of Orthodox circles when, after describing Sophiology, comments: ‘perhaps the reader is beginning to murmur ‘Gnosticism’ – and how rightly.’<sup>59</sup> He even states explicitly that: ‘it is still the case that in...Orthodox circles, Sophiology is largely rejected.’<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth Theokritoff further substantiates this claim:

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<sup>55</sup> Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, *Divine Sophia: The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov*, 2009, Ithaca, Cornell, p.102.

<sup>56</sup> The ‘Neo-Patristic Synthesis’ was a popular twentieth century Orthodox movement that was deeply indebted to the theology of Gregory of Palamas (1296-1359), specifically his distinction between the divine Essence and God’s Energies (see: Gregory Palamas, *The Triads* (trans: Nicholas Gendle), Paulist Press, 1988). His thought is still incredibly popular today amongst many Orthodox theologians (for instance, see: John D. Zizoulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, London, Continuum, 2008, p.70; Christos Yannaras, *Person and Eros* (trans: Norman Russell), Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2008).

<sup>57</sup> See: Vladimir Lossky, *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, New York, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974, p.112; Rowan Williams, *Sergei Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1999, p.173; Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2000, p.488. For a typical Orthodox (Neo-Patristic synthesis) response to Russian Sophiology, see: Vladimir Lossky’s classic extended pamphlet: Vladimir Lossky, *Spor o Sofii* (Спор о Софии), Изд-во Свято-Владимирского Братства, 1996; Georges Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology II*, Vaduz, 1987, p.251. Both thinkers criticize Sophiology for a variety of reasons, but predominantly for its willingness to philosophize from ‘outside of the Orthodox tradition.’ However, at least in the case of Lossky, as Rowan Williams has argued, the Neo-Patristic synthesis was itself not immune to influences from ‘external’ philosophical sources (e.g. the influence of Jean-Paul Satre on Lossky), see: Rowan Williams, *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*, London, SCM Press, 2007, pp.1-25.

<sup>58</sup> For a detailed account of these events see the collection of essays in *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, 49:1,2, 2005.

<sup>59</sup> Andrew Louth, ‘Wisdom and the Russians: the Sophiology of Fr. Sergei Bulgakov’, in: Stephen Barton (ed), *Where Shall Wisdom be Found?*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1999, pp.169-185, p.171.

<sup>60</sup> Andrew Louth, ‘Sergei Bulgakov and the Task of Theology’, in: *Irish Theological Quarterly* 74:3 2009, pp.243-257, p.245.

For many Orthodox theologians, the suspicion remains that Sophiological thought is in many ways closer to Gnosticism...than to Orthodox Christianity. It does not seem truly to take seriously the reality of a universe created out of nothing, a wholly new existence radically 'other' than God. Sophiological thought certainly draws on the Church Fathers, but to a degree it also unravels the Fathers' synthesis, revisiting Gnostic and Neoplatonic systems of intermediaries between the divine and the created.<sup>61</sup>

These concerns have also been recently shared by Cyril O'Regan, Paul Gavrilyuk, Mikhail Sergeev, and Regula Zwahlen, amongst others.<sup>62</sup>

Historically speaking, the reception of Sophiology within British theology has proven to be markedly more sympathetic and receptive;<sup>63</sup> most notably, by figures as significant as Donald MacKinnon (1913-1994) (who had put the French translation of the *Lamb of God* – one of Bulgakov's most significant works - on the Cambridge reading list for graduate courses in theology from as early as the late Sixties)<sup>64</sup> and Rowan Williams;<sup>65</sup> who from the latter's

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<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth Theokritoff, 'Creator and creation,' in: Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp.63-78, p.68.

<sup>62</sup> Cyril O'Regan, *Gnostic Return in Modernity*, 2001, p.36; Paul Gavrilyuk, 'The Reception of Dionysius in Twentieth-Century Eastern Orthodoxy', in Sarah Coakley and Charles Stang (eds), *Re-Thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2009, pp.177-95; Mikhail Sergeev, *Sophiology in Russian Orthodoxy*, Lampeter, Edwin Mellen, 2006; Zwahlen claims that Sophia is essentially a portion of divinity in its relation to created existence – God 'outside of himself' as it were: '*Bulgakov's Sophia stellt nun einen bestimmten 'Aspekt' der gottlichen ousia dar, der einem zusammenhang mit der schöpfung steht*' (Regula Zwahlen, *Das Revolutionäre Ebenbild Gottes: Anthropologien der Menschenwürde bei Nikolas Berdjaev und Sergej Bulgakov*, Berlin, Lit Verlag, 2010, p.275); see also: Aron Dunlap, *Counting Four: Assessing the Quaternity of C.G. Jung in the Light of Lacan and Sophiology*, UMI, 2008, pp.193-233.

<sup>63</sup> However, this was not the case initially. Canon John Douglas, General Secretary of the Church of England Council on Foreign Relations and a member of the council of the Anglican Church's Russian clergy and Church aid fund (which gave substantial financial backing to Bulgakov's theological institute in Paris) was worried about the Orthodox response to Bulgakov's theology and his teachings and requested the opinions of B.J. Kidd (then warden of Keble College, Oxford: 1920-1939) and N.P. Williams (Lady Margaret Professor of Christ Church Oxford in 1927). Brandon Gallaher notes that: 'Kidd wrote to Douglas that his opinion was worth little on the subject...since he was not at home "in the vagaries of oriental speculation; it all seems so weird and mystifying," and said that Bulgakov did not seem to deny the creeds at any point although much of his thinking was reminiscent of Gnosticism and the "irresponsible speculation" of Origen' (see: Brandon Gallaher and Irina Kukota, 'Protopresbyter Sergii Bulgakov: Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to the Unfading Light,' in: *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 49:1-2 (2005), pp.5-46, pp.8-10). Williams drew similar conclusions: 'Bulgakov had always seemed to him when they met to discuss theology an "ultra-conservative" although his "language about Sophia certainly seems very wild and semi-Gnostic in sound"' (Ibid, p.11). For Bulgakov's ecumenical involvement with the Anglican Church and his time within the 'Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius' see: Brandon Gallaher, 'Bulgakov's Ecumenical Thought', in: *Sobornost* 24:1 (2002) pp.24-55; Brandon Gallaher, 'Bulgakov and Intercommunion', in: *Sobornost* 24:2(2002), pp.9-28.

<sup>64</sup> See: Rowan Williams, *Sergei Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1999, p.14.

<sup>65</sup> See: Donald Mackinnon, *Explorations in Theology*, London, SCM, 1979, p.26; Rowan Williams, *Sergei Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology*; Rowan Williams, 'Creation, Creativity and Creatureliness: the Wisdom of Finite Existence', 2005, cited at: <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2106/creation->

contributions on the subject, one can detect a clear rise in interest in the Russian thinkers (especially Bulgakov) even amongst Western based Orthodox Christians.<sup>66</sup>

However, the first major theological and philosophical engagement with the theme of Sophiology to occur within Britain, is undoubtedly evidenced in the work of John Milbank who, in 2009, produced his Sophiological reflections – *Sophiology and Theurgy: A New Theological Horizon*, which he had begun developing as early as 2005 – published in Adrian Pabst’s and Paul Schneider’s *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy*. It is here that Milbank lucidly expands the work of Solovyov, Florensky, and Bulgakov, incorporating their positions within his own theology and philosophy and the larger task of Radical Orthodoxy itself. Notably, Milbank utilizes Sophiology as a theological basis for engaging with contemporary scientific discourses such as evolutionary biology and cosmology. Milbank emphatically highlights the importance of Sophiology, as a theological theme, both for his own work and for the wider theological community. He states, for instance that Sophiology must be considered a ‘new theological horizon,’ he refers to the Russian theologians above as ‘the Russian masters,’ and even claims that it is ‘*the most significant theology of the two preceding centuries*.’<sup>67</sup> A detailed account of Milbank’s Sophiology and its context within his own theology shall be offered at a later stage, for now it suffices to note, by way of introduction, that Sophiology plays a central role in Milbank’s own theology, thus highlighting its relevance for contemporary theology. Although Milbank may be accredited with the responsibility of

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[creativity-and-creatureliness-the-wisdom-of-finite-existence](#), last cited: 13/02/2012; Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2000, pp.63-79; Rowan Williams, *A Margin of Silence: The Holy Spirit in Russian Orthodox Theology*, Éditions de Lys Vert, 2008.

<sup>66</sup> See, for instance: Andrew Louth, ‘Sergei Bulgakov and the Task of Theology’, p.250; David Bentley Hart, *In the Aftermath: Provocations and Laments*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2009, p.123; Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*; see also Randall Poole’s, Paul Valliere’s, and Steven Cassedy’s essays in: G.M. Hamburg and Randall Poole (eds), *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830-1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defence of Human Dignity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010; for the classic studies, see, for instance: V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy II*, London, Routledge, 1953, pp.469-532, 873-917; N.O. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, Michigan, International Universities Press, 1951; Leo Zander, *God and the World (Bog I Mir in two volumes)*, Paris, 1948; N. Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century*, New York, Harper & Row, 1963.

<sup>67</sup> John Milbank, ‘Sophiology and Theurgy: the New Theological Horizon’, in Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (eds), *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word*, Surrey, Ashgate, 2009, pp.45-86, p.45.

introducing Sophiology to mainstream British theology as David Dunn notes,<sup>68</sup> he is not its only advocate and pioneer.

William Desmond, the Hegel scholar and philosopher, has drawn comparisons between his ‘metaxological philosophy’ and Sophiology.<sup>69</sup> Willis Jenkins has sought to utilize Sophiology in an ecological/green theology that emphasises God’s relationship to nature.<sup>70</sup> Jenkins suggests that Sophiology has the potential of providing a theological foundation to engaging with nature in a productive and healing manner. Paul M. Collins has been influenced by Sophiology in his understanding of deification.<sup>71</sup> Angel F. Mendez Montoya has also sought to adopt Sophiology in her understanding of the presence of God in the act of eating.<sup>72</sup> Adrian Pabst has recently outlined the significance of Sophiology for Radical Orthodox theologians:

The idea and reality of relationality and participatory being is always already part of a wider economy that encompasses donation, excess, deification (*theosis*), and theurgy – as articulated in the works of Russian Sophiology, *nouvelle théologie* and Radical Orthodoxy.<sup>73</sup>

Furthermore, most recently Michael Martin has outlined a Sophiology based on the insights of Bulgakov and Milbank among others, in order to propose an imaginative synthesis between science and theology, one that upholds a unity between the rational and the mystical.<sup>74</sup>

Moreover, one can clearly detect a general rise in interest in Sophiology in the West, with recent works by Rowan Williams, Aidan Nichols, Andrew Louth, and David Bentley Hart testifying to this shift.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> David Dunn, ‘Radical Sophiology: Father. Sergej Bulgakov and John Milbank on Augustine,’ in: *Studies in Eastern European Thought* 64:3-4 (Nov 2012), pp.227-249, p.228.

<sup>69</sup> See: William Desmond, *Is There a Sabbath for Thought: Between Religion and Philosophy*, New York, Fordham, 2005, p.18.

<sup>70</sup> See: Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p.112.

<sup>71</sup> See: Paul M. Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature: Deification and Communion*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 2010, p.79.

<sup>72</sup> See: Angel F. Mendez Montoya, *The Theology of Food: The Eucharist and Eating*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2009, Chapter 3.

<sup>73</sup> Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics: the creation of hierarchy*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2012, p.390.

<sup>74</sup> See: Michael Martin, *The Submerged Reality: Sophiology and the Turn to a Poetic Metaphysics*, Angelico Press, 2015.

<sup>75</sup> Rowan Williams, ‘Creation, Creativity and Creatureliness: the Wisdom of Finite Existence’; Rowan Williams, *A Margin of Silence*; even more recently, Aidan Nichols, *Wisdom from Above: a Primer in the Theology of Fr. Sergei Bulgakov*, Gracewing, 2005; and amongst the Orthodox theologians: Andrew Louth, ‘Sergei Bulgakov and the Task of Theology,’ p.250; David Bentley Hart, *In the Aftermath*, p.123. Louth even includes an individual section devoted to Sophiology within his latest *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology* (see: Andrew Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology*, London, SPCK, 2013, pp.43-46).

More recently, the Protestant theologian Paul Fiddes, has produced a truly monumental work engaging with the theme of Wisdom: *Seeing the World and Knowing God: Hebrew Wisdom and Christian Doctrine in a Late-Modern Context* (2013).<sup>76</sup> Fiddes engages with the biblical Wisdom texts and modern theologies constructed out of these (including Solovyov, Florensky, and Bulgakov), and attempts to put them into conversation with contemporary philosophical, cultural and scientific discourses, to the end of constructing a theology that offers a fresh perspective of the modern experience of the self and the world; one that is truly shaped by modern scientific discourses and ecological concerns.

This concise overview of the significance of Sophiology within contemporary British theology, and, furthermore, how it has been used to engage with modern scientific and environmental discourses should highlight its wider importance and relevance both within the boundaries of theological study and beyond them.

Based on this brief survey, one could easily be given the impression that Sophiology emerges within British theological thought as an entirely positive discourse. However, this is not the case. More recently, the Eastern Orthodox theologian Brandon Gallaher, repeating past reproaches, has criticized the current appropriation of Russian Sophiology by some theologians on the grounds that it simply repeats many of the ‘fallacies’ that the twentieth century Russian theologians made. He particularly takes issue with John Milbank, arguing that he evidences a clear indebtedness to ancient Gnosticism. Gallaher states that, when founding a theology on the problem of mediation between God and the world, Milbank invariably begins with the ‘Gnostic problem of the differentiation of the one and the many whose “solution” is found in a primordial impossible “mediation” or an “ontological bridge” between the one and the many.’<sup>77</sup> Gallaher suggests that, like the Gnostics before him, Milbank struggles to account for genuine finite otherness within such a high doctrine of participation. In his attempt to stress the ontological compatibility of God and creation (where the boundaries of finitude: death, intellectual limitation, etc. are considered to be unnatural to original created reality and a product of the fall) finitude almost appears to be accidental, which requires another aspect of Gnostic mythology, as Gallaher further explains: Sophiology ‘inevitably seems to identify the Fall with some sought of

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<sup>76</sup> I owe a debt of gratitude to Oliver Davies for drawing my attention to this work and the significant role it could play within the thesis.

<sup>77</sup> Brandon Gallaher, ‘Graced Creatureliness: Ontological Tension in the Uncreated/Created Distinction in the Sophiologies of Solov’ev, Bulgakov and Milbank’, in *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 47:1-2, 2006, pp.163-190, p.176.



catastrophe in the absolute since it requires for Sophia a myth to narrate her duality as divine and creaturely.’<sup>78</sup> Gallaher’s suspicions of the themes alleged to underlie Milbank’s Sophiology have also been shared recently by Sung Il Yoo who has highlighted similar concerns, especially regarding Milbank’s tendency to conflate created being with the divine *esse* (which he characterises as an ‘ontological monism’) within his Sophiology.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Michael Scott Horton again calls into question the reality of finite existence within Milbank’s ontology of participation; accusing him of advocating being in a shared univocal capacity between Creator and creature which climaxes in Milbank’s Sophiology where: ‘the creator-creature distinction is blurred.’<sup>80</sup>

Therefore, these critical observations undoubtedly draw attention to the fact that the initial suspicions that haunted the Russian theologians that utilized the figure of Wisdom, have followed Sophiology to its contemporary manifestation in British theology.

Both in its contemporaneous and historical forms, criticism of Sophiology as a Gnostic discourse has always been the product of its origins as a theological discourse. Sophiology, as conceived in twentieth century Russia, was inseparable from the major philosophical background of that time, namely, German Idealism.<sup>81</sup> In fact, it might be more accurate to suggest that Sophiology alone was not considered to be a Gnostic thought form, but rather, German Idealism was, and on the basis that Sophiology was so deeply entwined with this philosophical culture, it was accused of embodying Gnostic themes itself. This brings us back to the scholarship of Baur, Voegelin, and O’Regan, and further highlights a key continuity between their arguments and the argument of this thesis. Any study of Valentinian Gnosticism’s influence on contemporary Sophiology must first take account of Valentinian Gnosticism’s influence on classic German philosophy, and then in this case, Russian Sophiology, which is so central to informing its manifestation in contemporary British theology.

As already noted, the argument that Gnostic religious thought had emerged within the modern period by way of post-Kantian philosophy was strongly insisted upon by all three of the major

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p.177.

<sup>79</sup> See: Sung Il Yoo, *Christology in a Postmodern Context: John Milbank’s Sacrifice and Gift*, Proquest, 2011.

<sup>80</sup> See: Michael Scott Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ*, Kentucky, John Knox, 2007, p.207.

<sup>81</sup> See: Rowan Williams, *Sergei Bulgakov*, p.19. See also: Aristotle Papanikolaou, ‘Personhood and its Exponents in Twentieth Century Orthodox Theology,’ in: Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp.232-246, p.232.

‘Gnostic return’ theorists that were discussed above.<sup>82</sup> These positions are seemingly confirmed by those Eastern theologians that once rejected Sophiology on these grounds and by the contemporary critics of Sophiology.

As already claimed, this thesis broadly shares the rudimental claims of Baur, Voegelin, and O’Regan, that Gnosticism is one of many significant hermeneutical approaches to modern systems of ideas, and that its genesis within these religious, philosophical, and political ideas of the modern period can be seen within post-Kantian philosophy. Although the scope of these fundamental suggestions has been finely filtered within the approach of this thesis, in its attempt to analyse and explore the influence of Valentinian Gnosticism on modern systems of thought, focusing on the specific theological theme of Sophiology, this analysis will still need to account for Gnosticism’s route into these contemporary discourses. Thus it will be essential to consider the Gnostic influence on German Idealism and Russian Sophiology before analysing its presence or absence in contemporary British theology in the guise of Sophiology.

Thus, to briefly recapitulate, the central tasks of this thesis have been outlined, namely, to assess the influence of Valentinian Gnosticism on modern systems of thought, by taking the theological theme of Sophiology as its concrete example. Justification for using this particular theological theme as the example has been offered, as well as its wider significance for the scholarly community, both within the theological community and beyond. It was further noted that in order to properly test this thesis it would be necessary to take account of Gnosticism’s influence on German Idealism and Russian Sophiology, as both inform the current discourse of Sophiology to such a large extent. In the brief survey that was conducted on Sophiology’s place

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<sup>82</sup> See: Ferdinand Christian Baur *Die Christliche Gnosis*; Johann Eduard Erdmann, *Natur oder Schöpfung: eine Frage an die Naturphilosophie und Religionsphilosophie*, Leipzig, 1848, p.12; Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, pp.320-40; Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*. For more literature on its broader influence on German Idealism and Romanticism see: Peter Koslowski, *The Discovery of Historicity in German Idealism and Historicism*, Berlin, Springer, 2005, p.34; Marc Maeschalk, *L’anthropologie politique et religieuse de Schelling*, Paris, Peeters, 1991, p.191; Xavier Tilliette, *L’absolu et la philosophie: essais sur Schelling*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1987, p.24; John Laughland, *Schelling Versus Hegel: From German Idealism to Christian Metaphysics*, Hampshire, Ashgate, 2007, pp.61-93; Carl Rashke, *The Interruption of Eternity: Modern Gnosticism and the Origins of the New Religious Consciousness*, Nelson-Hall, 1980; Joris Geldof, *Revelation, Reason, and Reality: Theological Encounters with Jaspers, Schelling, and Baader*, Peeters, 2007, p.159; Matt Ffytche, *The Foundation of the Unconscious: Schelling, Freud, and the Birth of the Modern Psyche*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p.106; Werner Hamacher, *Pleroma: a Reading in Hegel*, California, Stanford, 1998, p.91; on ‘Fichtean Gnosticism’ see: Jurgen Gebhardt, ‘Political Eschatology and Soteriological Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Germany’, in: Athanasios Moulakis (ed), *The Promise of History: Essays in Political Philosophy*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1985, pp.51-69, p.65; Holgor Zaborowski, ‘Fall and Freedom: a Comparison of Fichte’s and Saint Paul’s Understanding of Original Sin’, in: Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (eds), *After Jena: New Essays on Fichte’s Later Philosophy*, Northwestern University Press, 2008, pp.162-183.

within contemporary British theology, it was clear that, although it held a prevalent influence over a variety of scholars, two in particular, namely John Milbank and Paul Fiddes, could be considered to have developed the theme of Sophiology to the greatest extent; interestingly enough, both offer quite different utilizations of this theme, and will therefore be taken as the representatives of contemporary British Sophiology in the critical assessment of the extent to which Valentinian Gnosticism can be identified within these discourses.

It now remains to demonstrate how this thesis will go about achieving its purpose.

### **Outline of Method**

Perhaps the most developed methodology for studying the influence of ancient Gnostic thought forms on modern discourses would be that proposed by Cyril O'Regan. As already discussed, there is no greater influence on O'Regan's work than that derived from his reading of Baur. Despite his admiration of the latter, O'Regan maintains that in order to take his insights further, one is forced to modify his original methodological approach. According to O'Regan, Baur's use and application of the term Gnosticism for describing nineteenth century philosophy and theology was notably undisciplined. Baur seemingly had no strict criteria by which he could compare ancient Gnosticism to modern discourses, for his understanding of Gnosticism was simply too broad for it to carry any hermeneutical weight. He further criticises Voegelin on these same grounds.

In response to these shortcomings, O'Regan devotes much of his early scholarship trying to develop a methodology for his central argument; as already seen above, he outlines this work in his *Gnostic Return in Modernity*. Here O'Regan proposes, what is fundamentally a structuralist approach to history and narrative. According to O'Regan, every narrative has both a surface and a depth meaning (grammar). The surface meaning is historically tangible and pliable. However, the depth narrative grammar transcends the fluctuations of its ephemeral counterpart. O'Regan develops a depth narrative grammar for Valentinian theology (those tenets that he believes are utterly regulative to the discourse of Valentinism and without which would simply cease to be as such). Having outlined these fundamental tenets, O'Regan believes he is then in a position to critically evaluate and compare other discourses that conform to this depth narrative grammar, despite often drastic discontinuities in their 'surface arrangement.' Based on this methodological model O'Regan compares the depth narrative grammar of Valentinian Gnosticism to positions

which he identifies in Jacob Boehme and Hegel, for instance and suggests that these can be categorised as Gnostic discourses.

Although this is undoubtedly the most developed methodology proposed to address some of the short-comings in Baur and Voegelin's work, it will not be adopted within this thesis.

Firstly, in order to adopt O'Regan's method, one must seemingly accept the essential difference between the categories of depth and surface within narrative and history, and uphold a transcendental substance or subject underpinning the same. Whilst such a position can undoubtedly be argued for, it seems to fail to critically engage with the significant post-structuralist critique of this position found in thinkers such as Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze for instance. Furthermore, even if one accepts that such a transcendental substance untouched by history could exist outside or beneath its historical manifestation in narrative and history, narrative comparisons alone are unable to facilitate archaeology of thought. Put simply, the narrative approach would not be in a position to offer broad avenues of comparison or engage with the historical realities (including political, social etc.) that create and foster such comparisons.

Furthermore, the narrative method appears to be thoroughly bound to O'Regan's own deconstructive reading of 'Gnostic return' as a negative phenomenon. O'Regan states himself that he is playing the role of a modern Irenaeus. This tone and register will not be adopted within this thesis.<sup>83</sup>

As demonstrated above, this thesis shall seek to evaluate whether a tangible current of Valentinian thought does indeed appear in modern philosophical and theological discourses, as assessed through the theme of Sophiology. However, often such currents of thought are never clearly defined, least of all by those proposing them. Gnosticism's influence on modernity sometimes simply appears under the veil of a Christian influence, as indeed it does within Russian and contemporary British Sophiology. Thus, when the figure of Wisdom is being utilized by theologians such as Bulgakov or Milbank, it is often claimed that it is sourced from the biblical figure of Sophia. Taking this fact into account, any methodological approach to the central questions of this thesis will need to propose a way of distinguishing between the biblical figure of Wisdom and the Gnostic adaptation of Sophia, before being in a position to definitively assess its role in Russian and British Sophiology. As shall be outlined shortly, these distinctions

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<sup>83</sup> I owe a large debt of gratitude to Oliver Davies and Robert Beckford for their advice and direction on this point.

will be comprehensively defined in the first two chapters, which shall evaluate the role of Wisdom in the relevant biblical literature and in the corresponding Gnostic sources.<sup>84</sup> However, for now it will be of benefit to offer several preliminary definitions to distinguish between traditional Christianity and Valentinian Gnosticism that will be later substantiated in the first two chapters. Firstly, in contradiction to Valentinian Gnosticism, traditional Christianity has always insisted on the historical concreteness of the incarnation, it is not a metaphysical occurrence. Secondly, following on from this commitment, traditional Christianity resists myth, unlike Valentinian Gnosticism, which is founded on grand mythical narrations. Finally, Valentinian Gnosticism affirms that originary knowledge is redemptive or perfecting, unlike traditional Christianity, which rejects this point.

Therefore, in addressing its major questions, this thesis will attempt to document and critically evaluate Wisdom's historical journey into its modern appearance in contemporary theological discussions. It shall engage with alternative ways in which the same figure of Wisdom has been utilized, both historically and contemporarily, within theology, and those thought systems which have conditioned these manifestations. In order to do this, it shall take note of the historical, social and political dimensions and climates that have created these alternative approaches. It will not simply compare transcendental narrative structures, but historical, social and political conditions that produce such 'structures.' Simply put, the methodology that appears to be best positioned to facilitate the sort of comparisons and analyses that this thesis wishes to propose, would be Foucault's archaeological method. In what follows, a brief outline and interpretation of this method and how it will be utilized within this thesis shall be suggested.

### **Foucauldian Analysis: Facilitating Archaeology of Thought**

Certain malevolent people say that he is the new representative of a structural technology or technocracy. Others, mistaking their insults for wit, claim that he is a supporter of Hitler, or at least that he offends the rights of man (they will not forgive him for having proclaimed the 'death of man'). Some say that he is a shammer who cannot back himself up with reference to the sacred texts, and who seldom quotes the great philosophers. Others, though, claim that

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<sup>84</sup> Again, a debt of gratitude is owed to Oliver Davies and Robert Beckford on their suggestion to include material on these points.

something radically new has appeared in philosophy, and that this work is as beautiful as those it challenges. It celebrates the dawn of a new age.<sup>85</sup>

A concise portrait of the meandering hermeneutical legacy left in the wake of Michel Foucault's philosophy as summarized by his friend, Gilles Deleuze. Is it possible to identify a central theme or core purpose underlying Foucault's methodological approach? Does such a question already transgress this core purpose; if it does indeed exist? 'Book-length answers to this question abound.'<sup>86</sup> Angèle Kremer-Marietti once suggested that the key to understanding Foucault's philosophical-historical method was to interpret it under the metaphor of an anatomic gaze.<sup>87</sup> 'The 'archaeological' historian dissects many discourses and practices, denying himself the mirage of the global understanding of by-gone cultural totalities once perused by neo-idealists philosopher-historians.'<sup>88</sup> However, in stark contrast, Pamela Major-Poetzl has argued that Foucault must be compared to a modern physicist imposing structure onto a vast discourse of disorder.<sup>89</sup> Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow somewhat share this characterization, suggesting that Foucault's archaeological method is 'quasi-structuralist,' while the genealogical flavor of his later work is markedly post-structuralist.<sup>90</sup> Whereas Merquior suggests that there is no great chasm between Foucault the archaeologist and Foucault the genealogist.<sup>91</sup> Foucault's relationship to structuralism is a highly contested issue. At times he appears to endorse it, commenting on the purpose of his *The Birth of the Clinic*, he states: 'it is a structural study that sets out to disentangle the conditions of its history from the density of discourse, as do others of my works.'<sup>92</sup> Yet in *The Order of Things*, Foucault emphatically denies these connections, affirming that: 'In France, certain half-witted 'commentators' persist in labelling me a 'structuralist.' I have been unable to get it into their tiny minds that I have used none of the methods, concepts, or key terms that characterize structural analysis.'<sup>93</sup> Annie Guédez would appear to share the latter summary, going so far as to conflate Foucault's archaeological method with the notoriously anti-

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<sup>85</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, London, Continuum, 1999, p.3.

<sup>86</sup> J.G. Merquior, *Foucault*, London, Fontana, 1991, p.141.

<sup>87</sup> Angèle Kremer-Marietti, *Foucault et l'archéologie du savoir*, Paris, Seghers, 1974.

<sup>88</sup> J.G. Merquior, *Foucault*, p.141.

<sup>89</sup> Pamela Major-Poetzl, *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Western Culture: Toward a New Science of History*, North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

<sup>90</sup> Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983.

<sup>91</sup> J.G. Merquior, *Foucault*, p.142.

<sup>92</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, London, Routledge, 1989, p.xxii.

<sup>93</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London, Routledge, 1989, XV.

structuralist thought of Georges Gurvitch and Henri Lefebvre on the grounds that it upholds an anti-positivist stance.<sup>94</sup>

Others have attempted to understand Foucault's method by conceptualizing it as a neo-Nietzschean enterprise. Charles Lemert and Garth Gillian have argued that this Nietzschean influence had been introduced to Foucault through Georges Bataille.<sup>95</sup> Alan Sheridan also confirms the significance of Friedrich Nietzsche for Foucault's philosophy.<sup>96</sup> Merquior states that: 'Foucault's work...is arguably the prime instance of neo-Nietzscheanism in contemporary Western thought.'<sup>97</sup> The significance of the theme of the 'will to power' in Foucauldian analysis would appear to confirm these characterizations.<sup>98</sup>

Furthermore, Mark Olssen has described Foucauldian thought as a form of 'post-structuralist Marxism.'<sup>99</sup> Barry Smart somewhat shares this reading, claiming that Foucauldian analysis is born out of the disrepute of Marxism.<sup>100</sup>

Foucault himself, albeit under the pseudonym of 'Maurice Florence,' describes his methodology as being a form of Kantianism. He states: 'If Foucault is indeed perfectly at home in the philosophical tradition, it is in the critical tradition of Kant.'<sup>101</sup> Margaret McLaren notes that: 'it is not so much the question of truth or falsity that animates Foucault's explorations, but the conditions under which questions of truth and falsity emerge. In this sense, Foucault's project is Kantian.'<sup>102</sup> Moreover, in Foucault's essay *What is Enlightenment?* He praises Kant's ability to interrogate the present.<sup>103</sup> In a similar vein, Foucault has described himself as being an 'historian of the present.'

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<sup>94</sup> Annie Guédez, *Foucault*, Paris, Editions Universitaires, 1972; J.G. Merquior, *Foucault*, p.142.

<sup>95</sup> Charles Lemert and Garth Gillian, *Michel Foucault: Social Theory and Transgression*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1982. On Bataille's reading of Nietzsche see: Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, London, Continuum, 2004.

<sup>96</sup> See: Alan Sheridan, *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth*, London, Tavistock, 1980.

<sup>97</sup> J.G. Merquior, *Foucault*, p.143.

<sup>98</sup> Most distinctly outlined in his works on sexuality and the penal system.

<sup>99</sup> Mark Olssen, *Michel Foucault: Materialism and Education*, Westport, Bergin and Garvey, 1999, p.6.

<sup>100</sup> Barry Smart, *Foucault, Marxism and Critique*, London, Routledge, 1983.

<sup>101</sup> Margaret McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity*, New York, SUNY, p.44.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p.44

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p.44; Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in: Paul Rainbow (ed), *The Foucault Reader*, London Penguin, 1991, pp.32-51.

Foucault has also characterized himself as a philosophical sceptic. Once asked by an interviewer: ‘insofar as you don’t affirm any universal truth but raise paradoxes in thought and make of philosophy a permanent question are you a sceptic?’ To which Foucault responds with a resounding ‘Absolutely!’<sup>104</sup>

One can also clearly identify traits and approaches within Foucauldian analysis that point to a broader philosophical and historical context. For instance, Foucault’s commitment to philosophizing through a careful consideration of history would indicate a relationship to Hegel. Stuart Barnett claims that the crux of Foucault’s thought could be found in a particular reading of Hegelian philosophy.<sup>105</sup> One can also detect a desire in Foucault to liberate his method from being constrained by the perspective of the subject.<sup>106</sup> Perhaps this is to be understood as an anti-phenomenologist (anti-Husserlian) stance, as well as an anti-psychoanalytical one, or just another expression of his commitment to Nietzsche.

The sheer breadth of Foucault’s influence cannot be emphasized enough. Foucauldian analysis has penetrated disciplines as diverse as psychology,<sup>107</sup> education,<sup>108</sup> social work,<sup>109</sup> feminism,<sup>110</sup> Queer Theory<sup>111</sup> and has left scarcely any of the social sciences untouched.

The above can therefore serve to orientate the reader within some of the diverse ontological and epistemological surroundings of Foucauldian analysis. It remains to offer a detailed outline of what such analysis involves and how and why one would seek to apply it within this particular study.

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<sup>104</sup> Quoted in: Margaret McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity*, p.44.

<sup>105</sup> Stuart Barnett, *Hegel after Derrida*, London, Routledge, 1998, p.44.

<sup>106</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, London, Routledge, 2002, p.18.

<sup>107</sup> See: Derek Hook, *Foucault, Psychology and the Analytics of Power*, Palgrave, 2010.

<sup>108</sup> See, for instance: Gail Jardine, *Foucault and Education*, New York, Peter Lang, 2005; Stephen Ball (ed), *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge*, London, Routledge, 1990; Michael Peters and Tina Besley (eds), *Why Foucault? New Directions in Educational Research*, New York, Peter Lang, 2007.

<sup>109</sup> Adrienne Chambon, Allan Irving and Laura Epstein (eds), *Reading Foucault for Social Work*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1999.

<sup>110</sup> Feminist responses to Foucault vary greatly; ranging from positive appropriations to critical dismissals. See, for instance: Jana Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body*, London, Routledge, 1991; Caroline Ramazanoglu (ed), *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions Between Foucault and Feminism*, London, Routledge, 2002.

<sup>111</sup> Queer Theory is widely considered to be born out of Foucauldian analysis; see, for instance: William Benjamin Turner, *A Genealogy of Queer Theory*, Philadelphia, Temple, 2002.



Although clear vestiges of the archaeological method can be detected within Foucault's three major early monographs: *Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, and *The Order of Things*, it is not until *The Archaeology of Knowledge* that Foucault gives a clear rendition, in his own words, of his methodological approach.

Foucault's determination to remove the subject from historical analysis leads him to dismiss many of the conventional approaches of the history of ideas, which he believes was 'secretly, but entirely related to the synthetic activity of the subject'<sup>112</sup>; leading him to formulate entirely new avenues of historical inquiry. Within the history of thought:

One tries to rediscover beyond the statements themselves the intention of the speaking subject, his conscious activity, what he meant, or, again, the unconscious activity that took place, despite himself, in what he said or in the almost imperceptible fracture of his actual words; in any case we must *reconstitute another discourse*, rediscover the silent murmuring, the inexhaustible speech that animates from within the voice that one hears, re-establish the tiny, invisible text that runs between and sometimes collides with them. The analysis of thought is always allegorical in relation to the discourse it employs...The analysis of the discursive field is orientated in quite a different way; we must grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statement it excludes. We do not seek below what is manifest the half silent murmur of another discourse; we must show why it could not be other than it was, in what respect it is exclusive of any other, how it assumes, in the midst of others and in relation to them, a place that no other could occupy. The question proper to such an analysis might be formulated in this way: what is this specific existence that emerges from what is said and nowhere else.<sup>113</sup>

Within this form of analysis one is able to identify broad webs of various relations between differing discourses, something that Deleuze describes as a dispersed family, which echoes Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance.<sup>114</sup> Foucault describes this as 'the unities of discourse:'

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<sup>112</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.15.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, pp.30-31 (my emphasis).

<sup>114</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, p.17. Wittgenstein gives the following example to illustrate his point: 'We are inclined to think that there must be something in common to all games, say, and that this common property is the justification for applying the general term 'game' to the various games; whereas games form a family the members of which have family likenesses. Some of them have the same nose, others the same eyebrows and others again the same way of walking; and these likeness overlap. The idea of a general concept being a common property of its particular instances connects up with other primitive, too simple, ideas of the structure of language. It is comparable to the idea that properties are ingredients of the things which have the properties; e.g. that beauty is an ingredient of all beautiful things as alcohol is of beer and wine, and that we therefore could have pure beauty, unadulterated by anything that is beautiful (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1958, p.17).

Relations between groups of statements thus established (even if these groups do not concern the same, or even adjacent, fields; even if they do not possess the same formal level; even if they are not the locus of assignable exchanges); relations between statements and groups of statements and events of a quite different kind (technical, economic, social, political).<sup>115</sup>

One sees this, for instance, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault is able to identify diverse interrelated power themes at play within seemingly unrelated discourses. He notes:

Is it surprising that the cellular prison, with its regular chronologies, forced labor, its authorities of surveillance and registration, its experts in normality, who continue and multiply the functions of the judge, should have become the modern instrument of penalty? Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?<sup>116</sup>

In order to analyze and identify the unities of discourse, Foucault suggests that one must look to uncover the *discursive formations* of a given group of discourses: ‘the unity of a discourse is based not so much on the permanence and uniqueness of an object as on the *space* in which various objects emerge and are continually transformed.’<sup>117</sup> This ‘space’ can be understood as a regulative interplay of factors that produce related statements or unities of discourses:

Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations, we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a *discursive formation*).<sup>118</sup>

Thus, if a discursive formation is the condition in which these patterns can be identified between statements and discourses, then the conventions which ‘govern’ them can be entitled the *rules of formation*.<sup>119</sup>

Rules of formation within a discourse produce *objects* for that discourse. For instance, Foucault suggests that the rules of formation within a discourse on madness produce objects such as the vagabond or the pauper, which must then be analyzed ‘by relating them to the body of rules that enable them to form as objects of a discourse and thus constitute the conditions of their historical appearance.’<sup>120</sup> Therefore, in *Madness and Civilization* the objects: the vagabond and

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, p.32.

<sup>116</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, London, Penguin, pp.227-28. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari offer a concise summary of Foucault’s approach here. See: Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia II: A Thousand Plateaus*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, pp.76-77.

<sup>117</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.36 (my emphasis).

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p.41.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, p.42.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, p.53.

the pauper would be analyzed by evaluating the conditions which produced them as objects, namely, the concept of unproductivity; existing within a given set of expected economic and social conventions, the pauper – as unproductive – had no place which led to his confinement.<sup>121</sup>

Foucault further outlines, what he describes as, *the formation of the enunciative modalities* existing within a discourse. By which he appears to mean the conditioned role from which a discourse is spoken, the conventions that accord this role with such authority. Rather than investigating a history conditioned by a psychological or transcendental subject, Foucault seeks to assess the historical circumstances that make the existence of such a role possible. For instance, ‘medical statements cannot come from anybody; their value efficacy, even their therapeutic powers, and, generally speaking, their existence as medical statements cannot be dissociated from the statutorily defined person who has the right to make them.’<sup>122</sup> Moreover, one must also investigate the ‘institutional sites’ which create such a role. In the *Will to Knowledge*, Foucault outlines the discursive formation of the role of *confession* and how it, in turn, forms the enunciative modalities or subjects such as the priest, the doctor, the teacher, etc.:

The *scientia sexualis* that emerged in the nineteenth century kept as its nucleus the singular ritual of obligatory and exhaustive confession, which in the Christian West was the first technique for producing the truth of sex. Beginning in the sixteenth century, this rite gradually detached itself from the sacrament of penance, and via the guidance of souls and the direction of conscience...emigrated toward pedagogy, relationships between adults and children, family relations, medicine, and psychiatry.<sup>123</sup>

Foucault notes that within this interplay of relations, concepts are formed and rules governing those concepts within the respective discursive formation. It is precisely the conditions in which they emerge that Foucault seeks to analyze:

What properly belongs to a discursive formation and what makes it possible to delimit the group of concepts, disparate as they may be, that are specific to it, is the way in which these different elements are related to one another; the way in which, for example. The ordering of descriptions or accounts is linked to the techniques of rewriting; the way in which the field of memory is linked to the forms of hierarchy and subordination that govern the statements of a text...It is this group of relations that constitutes a system of conceptual formation.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, London, Tavistock, 1967, p.230.

<sup>122</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.56.

<sup>123</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: I*, London, Penguin, 1990, p.68.

<sup>124</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.66.

Thus it is important to note that concepts do not govern discourse, according to Foucault, but, rather, the rules and interplays of various relations within a discourse govern the formation of concepts. This approach is therefore markedly ‘de-objectified’ as well as being ‘de-subjectified.’

Foucault further discusses the significance of the *formation of strategies* within a discursive formation. By which he implies the existence of certain themes that regulate the subjects’ interaction within a given field; the horizon or lens by which discourses are engaged with.

Such discourses as economics, medicine, grammar, the science of living beings give rise to certain organizations of concepts, certain regroupings of objects, certain types of enunciation, which form, according to their degree of coherence, rigor, and stability, themes or theories...I shall call these themes and theories ‘strategies.’<sup>125</sup>

An example of the formation and function of strategies can be seen in the dominant organizing gaze of ‘the table.’ The table is a ‘kind of knowledge [involving] the allotting of the sign to all that our representation can present us with.’<sup>126</sup> This instance of organizing representations with definitive tables of categorized signs governs and compares a variety of discourses:

It is in this area that we encounter natural history – the science of the characters that articulate the continuity and the tangle of nature. It is also in this area that we encounter the theory of money and the theory of value – the science of the signs that authorize exchange and permit the establishment of equivalences between men’s needs or desires. Lastly, it is also in this region that we find general grammar – the science of the signs by means of which men group together their individual perceptions and pattern the continuous flow of their thoughts. Despite their differences, these three domains existed in the Classical age only in so far as the fundamental area of the ordered table was established between the calculation of equalities and the genesis of representations.<sup>127</sup>

Therefore, Foucault’s archaeological method can be described as an analysis of the various interplays and rules that regulate a unity of discourse:

We set out with an observation: with a unity of a discourse like that of clinical medicine, or political economy, or Natural History, we are dealing with a dispersion of elements. This dispersion itself – with its gaps, its discontinuities its entanglements, its incompatibilities, its replacements, and its substitutions – can be described in its uniqueness if one is able to determine the *specific rules* in accordance with which its objects, statements, concepts, and theoretical options have been formed: if there really is a unity, it does not lie in the visible, horizontal

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid, p.71.

<sup>126</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p.81

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

coherence of the elements formed; it resides, well anterior to their formation, in the system that makes possible and governs that formation.<sup>128</sup>

Thus, it is essential to note that the archaeological method operates within a certain space existing in the discourse, a space where a given statement correlates within a web of diverse relations that regulate and produce its formation:

A statement is not confronted...by a *correlate* – or the absence of a correlate – as a proposition has (or has not) a referent...It is linked rather to a ‘referential’ that is made up not of ‘things’, ‘facts’, realities, or ‘beings’, but of laws of possibility, rules of existence for the objects that are named, designated or described within it, and for the relations that are affirmed or denied in it. The referential of the statement forms the place, the condition, the field of emergence, the authority to differentiate between individuals or objects, states of things and relations that are brought into play by the statement itself; it defines the possibilities of appearance and delimitation of that which gives meaning to the sentence, a value as truth to the proposition.<sup>129</sup>

This strategy liberates historical analysis from the constraints of a given subject or author of the statement. Instead, one can analyze the discourse which contains subjects: ‘a group of statements that belong to a single system of formation; thus I shall be able to speak of clinical discourse, the discourse of natural history, psychiatric discourse.’<sup>130</sup>

Archaeology is therefore not interested in deliberately normalizing modalities of power by affirming the truth or falsity of a given statement within a discourse, but, rather, in analyzing the conditions which form the criteria of truth and falsity existing within a given discourse.

Foucault offers the analogy of a tree of derivation when describing archaeology:

Archaeology – and this is one of its principal themes – may thus constitute the tree of derivation of a discourse...it will place at the root, as *governing statements*, those that concern the definition of observable structures and the field of possible objects, those that prescribe the forms of description and the perceptual codes that it can use, those that reveal the most general possibilities of characterization, and thus open up a whole domain of concepts to be constructed, and, lastly, those that, while constituting a strategic choice, leave room for the greatest number of subsequent options. And it will find, at the end of the branches, or at various places in the whole, a burgeoning of ‘discoveries’ (like that of fossil series), conceptual transformations (like the new definition of the genus), the emergence of new notions (like that of mammals or organism),

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<sup>128</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.80.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, p.103.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, p.121.

technical improvements (principles for organizing collections, methods of classification and nomenclature).<sup>131</sup>

Furthermore, archaeology implies five distinct tasks adopted when analyzing a distinctive discourse, which Foucault suggests can be conceptualized as follows: the first is concerned to demonstrate ‘how quite different discursive elements may be formed on the basis of similar rules.’<sup>132</sup> These are described as *archaeological isomorphisms*. The second seeks ‘to show to what extent these rules do or do not apply in the same way’;<sup>133</sup> whether they are constructed using the same model or order. This task is described by Foucault as an attempt to define the *archaeological model* of each formation. The third is to demonstrate how varying concepts may occupy a similar position within an alien domain of discourse. Thus, for example, in *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault demonstrates how sexual pleasures were problematized within a series of quite distinct discourses such as medicine, philosophy, economics, etc.<sup>134</sup> The fourth is related to the third and is an attempt to articulate the *archaeological shifts* within unities of discourse, thus to note how a single notion may be identical within two distinct archaeological fields. And lastly, to highlight *archaeological correlations*.

Despite these categories, the four major avenues in which archaeological analysis operates are the rules of discursive formation, the formation of concepts, the formation of enunciative modalities, and the formation of strategies. However, it is important to note that the archaeological method does not attempt to impose a super structure onto discourse, some totalizing view. Although, neither should it be understood as a ‘Rhizomatic’ or ‘Schizo-analytical’ enterprise in the Deleuzian sense<sup>135</sup>; rather, it documents the correlations, unities and

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, p.164.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, p.178.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality*:2, London, Penguin, 1992.

<sup>135</sup> Although Deleuze and Guattari have undoubtedly been influenced by Foucault on this point, the two approaches diverge, in so far as archaeology does presuppose intricate webs of relations based on similarities and differences existing within unities of discourse, no matter how incongruent they may be. Although these are not necessarily similarities of concepts or objects, there are similarities existing within the space that produces them. Without these, Foucault could not propose unities of discourse such as ‘psychiatry,’ which appear integral to archaeological analysis. Although Deleuze acknowledges these ‘families that are naturally dispersed’ (Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, p.17), he somewhat underplays their significance and suggests that archaeology shares the major contentions of his own enterprise: ‘despite isomorphisms and isotopies, no formation provides the model for another. The theory of divisions is therefore an essential part of the system. One must pursue the different series, travel along the different levels’ (Ibid, pp.19-20). However, the Rhizome does not appear to permit the ‘comparisons’ or unities of discourse that archaeology requires. Although archaeology may be a significant step away from structuralism, the Rhizome and Schizo-analysis, as with most of Deleuzes’ ‘concepts’, appear to emphasize the inter-related webs of

differences that emerge *within* the space of the regulations or rules of formation of the discourse itself.

It is not a task that can ever be completed, as new layers and further insights can always be extracted. Neither does it analyze discourses by imposing on it a strict analytical or ‘scientific’ framework that utilizes the categories outlined above without flexibility. In all of Foucault’s major monographs both prior and posterior to *The Archaeology of Knowledge* one is not met with the strict application of these definitions and categories when analyzing discourse, it should rather be conceived as an outline of a host of possibilities to explore when interpreting a particular discourse.

Within this thesis, Foucault’s archaeological method shall be employed to investigate whether or not Valentinian Gnosticism can be documented to have exerted a significant influence on the modern theological discourse of Sophiology. In order to do this, it will first be necessary to establish the rules of discursive formation for ‘traditional’ Christian/biblical renditions of Sophiology, looking especially to establish how the biblical concept of Sophia is generated, and, what this looks like as a concept enshrined within an authoritative tradition. The same strategy shall then be adopted for the analysis of the Valentinian Gnostic conception of Sophia, before critically comparing these two traditions and establishing their distinct rules of formation and their respective concepts and strategies. This shall be proposed in the first two chapters of the thesis. In the first chapter, close critical analysis of the respective biblical wisdom texts (including Old Testament, Apocryphal, and New Testament sources) utilizing the above approach, shall be offered before doing the same for the Valentinian wisdom texts.

Having established the archaeology of the two wisdom traditions, a detailed analysis of post-Kantian Idealism shall ensue. In Foucauldian terms, German Idealism, following Baur, Voegelin and O’Regan, will preliminarily be considered as the *rules of formation* for the respective wisdom traditions emergence within Russian and British theology. Put simply, German idealism, as the condition or background which encourages the production of Valentinian Sophiology in Russian and British theology, will be critically assessed as to how this becomes possible. In

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*differences*, multiplicities, assemblages etc. in a manner that asserts the primacy of difference, which although is not unrelated to archaeology, cannot be considered to be synonymous with it (on Schizo-analysis see: Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia I: Anti-Oedipus*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, pp.313-435; and on the Rhizome see: Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia II: A Thousand Plateaus*, pp.1-29).

order to establish these rules of formation, chapter three shall document the rise of certain philosophical and theological questions emerging in the wake of Kantian philosophy, focusing on Friedrich Heinz Jacobi's interpretation of Kant, how this effects Reinhold's philosophical system and its critics, before analysing Fichte's philosophical proposals, noting the emergence of a specific set of philosophical and theological problems that have strong parallels to the philosophical and theological problems on which Gnostic theology is governed.

In chapter four, the immediate inheritor of these philosophical conundrums shall be analysed, along with his highly developed attempts at resolving these issues, where Gnostic mythology is drawn upon in order to confront these same problems. Chapter four shall therefore focus on the philosophy of Schelling, with specific interest in the formation of the conditions that generate theological appeals to Gnosticism, and how these theological proposals ultimately take shape.

Chapter five shall investigate the impact of these rules of formation for Sophiology within 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian theology. A detailed critical engagement with Vladimir Solovyov and Sergius Bulgakov's 'wisdom writings' shall be offered, in an attempt to trace Valentinian Gnostic themes and biblical influences on their respective Sophiologies, especially those mediated by German Idealism. Here the hermeneutical scholarship of chapters one and two shall be drawn upon to facilitate this archaeology. Moving towards a conclusion as to whether there is a predominant Gnostic presence within Russian Sophiology, and the form or concept that this produces.

In chapter six, we shall discuss the two prevalent theological adoptions of the figure of Wisdom in contemporary British theology, by John Milbank and Paul Fiddes respectively. In the case of both theologians, close critical analysis of their portrayals of Wisdom shall be explored, attempting to detect the tangible presence of Gnostic thought forms, mediated through Russian and German thought, or, and, the dominating presence of traditional Christian renditions of the biblical figure of Wisdom. If Gnostic tendencies are discovered, attempts will be made to contour alternatives, before concluding the thesis.



## **Chapter I**

### **Towards an Archaeology of the Biblical Figure of Wisdom**

As Gordon Fee has proposed,<sup>136</sup> there are fundamentally three key texts within the Old Testament and the Apocryphal wisdom literature that are suggested to have provided the foundation for New Testament wisdom theology. These are: *Proverbs 8:22-31*, *Sirach 1:4-22, 24*, and *Wisdom 6:1-10:21*. Before assessing just how these texts are utilised theologically by the early Christians, we first need to establish how the conventions and regulations that govern the Old Testament and the Apocryphal portrayals of Wisdom themselves were first formed and the respective concepts that these entail; attempting to explore whether one can identify an authoritative Hebraic concept of Wisdom, distinct from pagan traditions. This chapter will therefore attempt to address the archaeological questions concerning the identity, origins, and theological functions of the figure of Wisdom within the relevant Old Testament and Apocryphal texts, and what has conditioned them, before exploring the process of their adoption by the early Christians. Is the wisdom speculation of *Proverbs 8:22-31* an Egyptian or Mesopotamian import, is it compatible with the established enunciative field of Jewish monotheism, is Wisdom an hypostasised being, and so forth? Similarly, do the Apocryphal wisdom texts represent developed versions of the Wisdom figure in *Proverbs 8*, or are they clearly disjointed traditions, how far have they been influenced by Greek philosophical thought, to what extent do socio-political issues effect its portrayal? These, along with several other issues, demonstrate the difficulties surrounding the task at hand, as well as highlighting the need for an archaeological approach. Having explored these and other related topics, I shall hope to propose an archaeology of Old Testament and Apocryphal Wisdom theology that would be inherited by the early Christians, before going on to discuss the Christian appropriation of this theme itself, moving towards defining a biblical concept of wisdom.

#### **Proverbs 8:22-31.**

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<sup>136</sup> See: Gordon Fee, 'Wisdom Christology in Paul: A Dissenting View', in: J.I. Packer and S.K. Soderlund (eds), *The Way of Wisdom: Essays in Honour of Bruce K. Waltke*, Michigan, Harper, 2000, pp.251-80, p.252.

## An Archaeological Exegesis

Tremper Longman notes that a typical ancient Near Eastern autobiography begins with a self-introduction followed by a list of accomplishments. In relation to Wisdom's self-portrayal, we have the former in 8:12-21 and the latter in 8:22-31.<sup>137</sup> It is precisely the 'list of accomplishments' that presents the reader with the most hermeneutical difficulties. For instance, *Verse 22*:

יְהוָה בְּרֵאשִׁית דְּלִמְדָּתוֹ יִשְׁלַח יָדוֹ בְּרֵאשִׁית יוֹמִי וְיִבְרָא מֵעַתָּה

‘YHWH created me at the beginning of his ways before his acts of old.’

The ontological status of Wisdom initially depends on the way that one interprets the Hebrew verb בָּרָא. Typically, it is often used to indicate acquisition; something which has been obtained, gained, or possessed;<sup>138</sup> as when Eve *acquires* a son, who is named Cain, incidentally, after the same verb, with the help of the LORD (Gen 4:1). If Bruce Vawter is correct in claiming that this verb must always be translated as ‘to acquire,’<sup>139</sup> then this would seem to suggest that the figure of Wisdom is *uncreated* and *co-eternal* with YHWH himself. However, Michael Fox has argued that: ‘one way something can be acquired is by creation...English ‘acquire’ implies that the object was already in existence, but this is not the case with בָּרָא’.<sup>140</sup> In support of Fox’s thesis, there are more than several instances where the same verb implies ‘to create’; in *Genesis 14:19*, YHWH blesses Abram and refers to himself as the *maker* of heaven and earth (not acquirer!), and in *Deuteronomy 32:6* there is an admonishment that states: ‘is not he your father, who created you (בָּרָא), who made (עָשָׂה) you and established you.’ Notice that בָּרָא is synonymised with עָשָׂה in this instance, further suggesting that it can denote creation under certain circumstances and not acquisition. Having noted these points, it would seem that *verse 22* is upholding that Wisdom is *created*. Therefore, the figure of Wisdom is not ontologically

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<sup>137</sup> Tremper Longman, *Proverbs*, Michigan, Baker, 2006, p.203.

<sup>138</sup> See: Francis Brown, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (thirteenth ed), Massachusetts, Hendrickson, 2010, p.888.

<sup>139</sup> Bruce Vawter, ‘Yahweh: Lord of the heavens and the earth,’ in: *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48.3 (July 1986), 461-467.

<sup>140</sup> Michael Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, New York, Double Play, 2000, p.279.

synonymous with God himself; Wisdom has a ‘beginning.’ However, when we go on to consider the peculiar nature of this beginning, more hermeneutical difficulties arise.

*Verse 23* confirms that Wisdom was ‘woven/shaped/formed’ (עָרַב / עָרַב) ‘from the beginning, before the earth’ (עַד אֶרֶץ וְעַד מְאֹרֶת).’ Following this opening statement, as Ronald Murphy notes, we then get a ‘plethora of expressions to designate antiquity’, with the intention of ‘proving’ the initial claim that ‘Wisdom was there before anything else.’<sup>141</sup> In *verse 24*, which is clearly supposed to echo *Genesis 1:2*, we are told that Wisdom is ‘brought forth’ (וְלֹא הָיָה עֲמָקִים) when there were no depths (וְלֹא הָיָה עֲמָקִים); the only thing, along with the wasteland and the void (וְלֹא הָיָה עֲמָקִים), that appears to ‘be’ prior to God’s creative activity. In *Verse 27*, Wisdom announces its presence when God established the heavens and when he ‘marked out the horizon on the face of the deep.’ In a similar vein, *verse 29* refers to Wisdom’s presence when God established the limitations of the sea; echoing *Genesis 1:9* and, perhaps, the typical ancient Near Eastern creation myth which presupposed some watery chaos that would be overcome by the Creator.<sup>142</sup> What is clear at this point is that, although Wisdom was created, it was not created with creation *per se*; it ‘pre-exists’ the creation of the world. Therefore, the list of things that Wisdom is said to precede, is implemented as a rhetorical and poetical tool that can confirm that it was in being when nothing else was; as R.J. Clifford puts it: this list ‘portrays precreation chaos or nothingness concretely, i.e., by listing specific cosmic elements not in existence rather than the abstract concept of nothingness.’<sup>143</sup>

Ronald Murphy draws attention to the opening of *Verse 30* which begins:

אֲנִי עִמָּו כְּאֶרְכָּטָן כְּבָנָיִם

‘I was beside him as an architect/artist/craftsman/master worker’.

He argues that there is an interesting correlation between the אֲנִי עִמָּו of this verse and the two that famously occur in *Exodus 3:14*, where Moses asks for God’s name and he responds with the

<sup>141</sup> Ronald Murphy, *Proverbs*, Thomas Nelson, 1998, p.52.

<sup>142</sup> See: Longman, *Proverbs*, p.205.

<sup>143</sup> R.J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible*, Washington, Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1994, p.183.

statement ‘I AM.’ Murphy states that: ‘there can be hardly any doubt that *verse 30* alludes to that passage [Exd 3:14].’<sup>144</sup> On the basis of the earlier argument that suggested that Wisdom was ‘created’, we should refrain from concluding that this allusion is indicative of Wisdom’s identification with YHWH himself, it is more likely to indicate that Wisdom participated in the divine prerogative of creation, as suggested by לִנְחֹל and thus meriting the intimate allusion to YHWH himself. Longman suggests that לִנְחֹל has functional implications which are informative of Wisdom’s pre-existent presence before God; he argues that ‘Wisdom was not only present but also involved in creation as a guiding force.’<sup>145</sup> Longman is essentially correct in affirming that the לִנְחֹל is informative of Wisdom’s function before the Creator; however, ‘guiding force’ does appear to be something of an asserted assumption that reads too much out of one verb. It seems that, at most, we can tentatively affirm that Wisdom is ‘creative’ and is engaged in some sought of creativity before God. The root לִנְחֹל suggests some notion of confirmation or support. We can see this in *Ruth 4:16* where it is adapted to mean ‘nurse’ or ‘foster-mother,’ and similarly in *2 Kings 18:16*, it is used to describe the pillars or supports of the door. Such a reading would also make most sense in light of *Proverbs 3:19* where YHWH is said to ‘establish the earth in Wisdom.’ With this in mind, perhaps one can *speculate* that Wisdom’s creativity is something which is supportive or utilised in God’s creative activity.

*Verse 30* also states that:

וְאֵהָיָה לִּי שִׂשְׁוֹן יְמֵי יוֹם וָלַיְלָה לְפָנָיו וְאֵהָיָה לִּי שִׂשְׁוֹן יְמֵי יוֹם וָלַיְלָה לְפָנָיו

‘And I was his object of delight/desire from day to day, dancing/playing before him all the time.’

There are certainly jubilant connotations surrounding Wisdom’s presence before God, it is delightful to him and Wisdom appears to reciprocate this joy in a playful manner. O. Keel has argued that this notion of ‘playing before God’ is related to the figures which cartwheel before the Egyptian procession of divinities as illustrated in Egyptian iconography.<sup>146</sup> Whilst, there may be some evidence for ancient Near Eastern influences on the text, this thesis seems somewhat

<sup>144</sup> Ronald Murphy, *Proverbs*, Thomas Nelson, 1998, p.45.

<sup>145</sup> Longman, *Proverbs*, p.207.

<sup>146</sup> O. Keel, *Die Weisheit Spielt vor Gott*, Universitätsverlag Freiburg, Schweiz, 1974, pp.68-74.

over stretched, it is by no means an obvious reading and seems highly speculative. *Verse 31* states that, not only does Wisdom perform this ‘role’ before God, but also does the same before the created world; delighting in humanity (חָכְמָה בְּרַחֲמֵינוּ). Gerhard Von Rad and R.B.Y. Scott argue that Wisdom is something which functions immanently within the human sphere and its world, and that interpreters should distance themselves from the position that emphasises its role in creation, as this can lead to misapprehensions.<sup>147</sup> However, although Wisdom is created, the text seems to be at pains to suggest that it is not created with the rest of creation; Wisdom is clearly before the divine creative act *par excellence*, which implies that it is intimately related to God and must be interpreted in light of this intimacy, and not exclusively by its relationship to creation. Therefore, it appears that we can tentatively conclude from verses 30-31, with Longman, that Wisdom is mediatory.<sup>148</sup> It is difficult to say just how so. However, there is no doubt that Wisdom’s presence is communicated ‘between’ God and creation, related to both simultaneously. Murphy has recently suggested that the text may be deliberately ambiguous; it is meant to convey a mysterious relationship.<sup>149</sup>

### **The Figure of Wisdom under Biblical Authority (its Enunciative Field)**

Stuart Weeks has noted that: ‘it has become quite common to assert that Wisdom in *Proverbs* 8:1-9 is conceived of as a goddess figure, or more generally, that *Proverbs* 8 reflects a wider belief in the existence of a goddess Wisdom.’<sup>150</sup> Scholars such as Alice Sinnott and J.D.G. Dunn have argued that ‘religious monotheism was the milieu in which the personification texts were produced and treasured’<sup>151</sup>, and for this reason, *if* Wisdom is an hypostatic being or attribute independent of God, then this could not have come from Hebraic thought. However, despite this point, Judith Hadley, amongst others,<sup>152</sup> has attempted to argue that the Wisdom figure of *Proverbs* 8 is intimately related to the primitive goddess worship of *Asherah* and *Astarte* in Israel

<sup>147</sup> Gerhard Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, London, SCM, 1972, p.148; R.B.Y. Scott, ‘Wisdom in Creation: the *Amon* of *Proverbs* 8:3’, *VT* 10 1960, pp.213-223.

<sup>148</sup> Longman, *Proverbs*, p.207.

<sup>149</sup> Ronald Murphy, *Proverbs*, Thomas Nelson, 1998, p.45.

<sup>150</sup> Stuart Weeks, *An Introduction to the Study of Wisdom Literature*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 2010, p.41.

<sup>151</sup> A. Sinnott, *The Personification of Wisdom*, Burlington, Ashgate, 2005, p.176; see also: James. D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, London, SCM, 1980, p.174.

<sup>152</sup> See: H. Conzelmann, ‘The Mother of Wisdom’, in: R.K. Bultmann and J. Robinson (eds), *The Future of our Religious Past*, New York, 1964, pp.230-43.

and Judah. She suggests that the Hebrew texts slowly ‘de-deify’ the goddesses to the point of, either, their absence or their association with foreign idolatry. Against this background, she argues that the Wisdom figure in *Proverbs* 8 is something of a ‘literary compensation for the eradication of the worship of these goddesses [Asherah and Astarte].’<sup>153</sup> However, given that Hadley notes, according to her own thesis, that all of the references to these goddesses within Hebrew scripture before *Proverbs* 8 had focused on *removing* any remnants of associating Asherah or Astarte with divinity, it would seem almost remarkable that there would be a sudden demand for a reconceptualised manifestation of their divinity to compensate for their loss, when they would have already been so opprobriously conceived by this point. Furthermore, it seems difficult to believe that if there had been a conscious process throughout Hebrew scripture to de-deify the goddesses, why would *Proverbs* have included such an easily misinterpreted portrayal of Wisdom which would risk jeopardising this process of de-deification? For these reasons it would seem unlikely that Wisdom is related to early Hebrew goddess worship.

Scholars such as Bernhard Lang have argued that the Lady Wisdom of *Proverbs* is best understood in relation to her other ancient Near Eastern parallels.<sup>154</sup> The four that are most persistently suggested are the Egyptian goddesses *Ma’at* and *Isis* and the Mesopotamian goddesses *Mami* and *Siduri*. There are undoubtedly aspects apparent within the identities and roles of these figures which are comparable to the presentation of Wisdom in *Proverbs* 8. For instance, Sinnott notes that *Ma’at* has an independent existence, which some scholars have suggested parallels Wisdom.<sup>155</sup> *Ma’at* is said to have existed from antiquity; she existed before creation and during its manifestation. She is even said to have a role in the creative process and is intimately associated with the Creator.<sup>156</sup> Similarly, like Wisdom, *Isis* was said to have had a particular tenderness and warmth towards humanity, she had creative powers, and was known for her cunning.<sup>157</sup> In the Mesopotamian traditions, the *Atrahasis* talks of the mother goddess *Mami* who ‘with the help of the wise god *Ea*, created men out of clay mixed with the blood of a slain

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<sup>153</sup> Judith Hadley, ‘Chasing Shadows? The quest for the historical goddess’, in: J.A. Emerton (ed), *Congress Volume*, Cambridge 1995, Brill, pp.169-85, p.180.

<sup>154</sup> See: Bernhard Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: a Hebrew goddess redefined*, Michigan, Pilgrim Press 1986. See also: J.C. Greenfield, ‘The Seven Pillars of Wisdom (Prov 9:1) – a Mistranslation’, in: *JQR* 76, 1985, 13-20.

<sup>155</sup> Sinnott argues that C. Kayatz suggests that this is the case (Sinnott, *The Personification of Wisdom*, p.37).

<sup>156</sup> Sinnott, *The Personification of Wisdom*, p.37.

<sup>157</sup> See: Geraldine Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology: God, Goddesses, and Traditions of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp.149-52.

god called *Ilawela*.<sup>158</sup> She is also introduced as the *wise Mami* on several occasions.<sup>159</sup> *Saduri* also appears to occupy some sought of advisory role in relation to *Gilgamesh*.<sup>160</sup> Sinnott notes that the evidence for any direct link between these traditions and the figure of Wisdom remains elusive and inconclusive.<sup>161</sup> However, there are several arguments that would indicate that this is not the case. Firstly, all of the proposed ancient Near Eastern figures were worshipped as goddesses; as individual deities existing apart from the Creator. As Dunn has argued, there is no parallel to this phenomenon within the Judaism of this period in relation to Wisdom. His primary argument of why this did not occur was because *Wisdom was not considered to be an independent hypostasised attribute or divine being in the same way that these goddesses were*. He argues that Wisdom is the product of ‘vivid personification’<sup>162</sup> which is paralleled in the Hebrew canon on numerous occasions, which would include God’s right arm (Ps, 45:4), righteousness and peace (Ps, 85:10), God’s faithfulness (Ps, 57:3), and so forth. And, that unless one is willing to claim that God’s right arm is an independent hypostasis, then one should not attempt to attribute this definition to the figure of Wisdom either.<sup>163</sup> When one takes an even closer look at the proposed commonalities, one struggles even to identify clear literary patterns between the texts. *Ma’at*, for instance, is ‘never personified in Egyptian wisdom books...she is never portrayed as speaking in the first person.’<sup>164</sup> It would seem then that these suggestions do not sufficiently account for the development and use of the Wisdom figure within the Hebrew canon. At best, as R.N. Whybray and Sinnott have noted,<sup>165</sup> they are merely indicative of a shared ancient Near Eastern worldview of creation, that foreign creation myths would have been known by the Hebrews, and that they could have creatively engaged with some of these myths; where the language of which, however, within Jewish monotheism, would have had very different connotations to the way in which it would have been understood in the other ancient

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<sup>158</sup> Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p.4.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, p.16.

<sup>160</sup> See: Ibid, p.98.

<sup>161</sup> Sinnott, *The Personification of Wisdom*, pp.51-52.

<sup>162</sup> James. D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, London, SCM, 1980, p.170

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, p.174.

<sup>164</sup> Sinnott, *The Personification of Wisdom*, p.38.

<sup>165</sup> See: R.N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.52; A. Sinnott, *The Personification of Wisdom*, Burlington, Ashgate, 2005, p.51.

Near Eastern traditions.<sup>166</sup> However, they do not suggest that Wisdom is a substitute or a Hebrew response to her neighbouring deities, or that these myths informed the identity and the theological functions which Wisdom performed, they appear to be used uniquely in the Hebrew canon.<sup>167</sup>

One of the unique and incomparable aspects of Hebraic Wisdom is its lack of hypostatic independence from the Creator. Dunn has already noted that Wisdom is the product of ‘vivid personification;’ however, it would appear that, contrary to R. Marcus and G. Von Rad respectively, it is neither a personification of an attribute of God nor of cosmic harmony (if the latter is thought to be something immanent to creation which is independent of God’s salvific acts in history).<sup>168</sup> Firstly, it is unlikely that the Hebrews would have thought of concrete ‘attributes’ as something to be conceived independently of the Creator and neither would they have considered cosmic harmony to be inherent in the world independently of God’s saving and redemptive presence among them. It seems that the best description of the theological functions which Wisdom is performing is described by Dunn, which is worth quoting at length:

Wisdom...was a way of asserting God’s nearness, his involvement with his world, his concern for his people. All these words provided expressions of God’s *immanence*, his active concern in creation, revelation and redemption, while at the same time protecting his holy transcendence and wholly otherness...The language may be the language of wider speculation of the time, but within Jewish monotheism and Hebraic literary idiom Wisdom never really becomes more than a *personification*...of a *function* of Yahweh.<sup>169</sup>

Therefore, it would seem that one can identify, within the *Proverbs* text, a Hebraic concept of Wisdom that is governed by biblical authority, and that Wisdom performs theological functions, despite bearing some semblances to other ancient Near Eastern parallels, which are compatible with Jewish monotheism. Before addressing the historical and social question as to what would have necessitated a distinctly Hebraic formation of such a figure, we shall first recapitulate the Hebraic concept of Wisdom and its rules of formation.

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<sup>166</sup>See: James. D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: a New Testament inquiry into the origins of the doctrine of the incarnation*, London, SCM, 1980, p.170. Wilfred Watson, when discussing the role of personification within Hebrew poetry, notes that ‘it was largely a matter of demythologising ancient Canaanite borrowings’ (Wilfred Watson, *Classic Hebrew Poetry: a Guide to its Techniques*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1984, p.270).

<sup>167</sup>Sinnott, *The Personification of Wisdom*, p.51.

<sup>168</sup> See: R. Marcus, ‘On Biblical Hypostases of Wisdom’, in: *HUCA* 23, 1950-51, p.167; Gerhard Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, Pennsylvania, Trinity Press, 1972, Pp.144-76.

<sup>169</sup> Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, p.176.



The fundamental conventions which seem indispensable and entirely regulative in respect to the figure of Wisdom's identity and role within *Proverbs 8* are as follows:

- i) Wisdom is *distinct* from God; it is created and has a beginning of sorts.
- ii) Wisdom's distinctness from God is *not* indicative of it being an independent hypostasis or deity alongside the Creator.
- iii) Wisdom's created origins are *mysterious* and unknowable, as it pre-existed the creation of the cosmos and is *not* to be construed as coming into being with the creative act *par excellence*.
- iv) Wisdom is creative and is creative in the presence of God.
- v) Wisdom is the delight of God and reciprocates this with playful joy.
- vi) Wisdom performs this same role before the created world and delights in humanity.
- vii) Wisdom occupies a mediatory position 'between' God and creation; it is in the presence of both simultaneously.

Wisdom's theological functions (those rules which formed Wisdom as a concept) can be constructed as a form of *creative mediation*:

- i) Wisdom communicates God's presence to the world and the world's presence to God; Wisdom paradoxically affirms God's immanence whilst upholding his transcendence; revealing and concealing him simultaneously.
- ii) Wisdom is a personified *relationship* between God and creation that is established 'prior' to the creation of the world.
- iii) Wisdom is both created and uncreated in her mediatory role; God's relationship to creation must have ontologically preceded the same, although it must have also had an actualisation and hence a 'beginning' in relation to the actualisation of created reality.
- iv) Given that such a relationship pre-supposes creation; one could also say that it is creative in itself in so far as God's desire and love for creation would have brought it into being.

Having outlined the concept of Hebraic Wisdom in *Proverbs 8* and the theological functions which led to its formation in this particular way, the social, political and historical context of this particular concept shall now be investigated.

### **The Socio-Political context of Wisdom's formation in *Proverbs 8*.**

Sinnott has recently argued that the Wisdom figure of *Proverbs 1-9* was constructed sometime after 587 BCE in the exilic or post-exilic period of Jewish history.<sup>170</sup> There are several reasons for proposing such a period, *Proverbs 1-9* bares close similarities to the Priestly account in Genesis; public places, in which Wisdom appears, are never named, which could be suggestive of either their insignificance or their location within a foreign land; and the prophetic motifs and styles apparent in Wisdom's speeches are common to the exilic and post-exilic period.<sup>171</sup>

Scholars who have interpreted Wisdom as a literary or theological device have tended to opt for this position, as such an environment best explains why such a figure would have needed to have been invented.<sup>172</sup> However, scholars who have emphasised Wisdom as a product of various ancient Near Eastern influences have inclined to propose a much earlier date. However, as it appeared, from the above analysis that the Hebraic figure of Wisdom is best understood as a theological reflection on God's mysterious relationship to creation and not as a foreign import, it would appear most fitting to explore the possible contexts which would have occasioned the need to produce this theological figure. The most commonly suggested background is an exilic or post-exilic period, which seems most likely to have required such a theology.

The Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic literature bares testimony to an established pre-exilic Hebrew theology; much of which was centred on national and geographical exclusiveness. For instance, YHWH had established a covenant with Israel as a *nation* (Exod, 19:5-6), he had inaugurated the Davidic monarchy (2 Sam, 7:1-15), and had associated his presence among his people with the Temple in Jerusalem. As Sinnott rightly concludes, all of these factors presupposed the national distinctiveness and autonomy of the Hebrews within their own exclusive geography.<sup>173</sup> Needless to say, in the event of an exile, all of the above positions would

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<sup>170</sup>Sinnott, *The Personification of Wisdom*, p.53.

<sup>171</sup> See: Ibid, pp.3-7.

<sup>172</sup> See: C. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of proverbs*, Sheffield, 1985, pp.233-82; L.G. Perdue, 'Liminality as a Social Setting for Wisdom Instruction', in: *ZAW 93 1981 pp.114-126*.

<sup>173</sup>Sinnott, *The Personification of Wisdom*, p.55.

have had to have been radically reconceived if a Hebrew identity was to survive. For, such a context would render much pre-exilic theology groundless; there would be a legitimate danger of losing Jewish religious identity through assimilation into foreign cultures. It is at this point that the figure of Wisdom and its theological functions begin to make most sense.

R.E. Clements has noted that these new contextual demands could ‘most readily be met by the wisdom tradition, which had ancient roots in Israelite life, and yet did not appeal for the authority and truth of its teachings to a unique revelation bestowed on Israel as a nation at the decisive moment of its origin.’<sup>174</sup> The emphasis on Wisdom’s ability to communicate YHWH’s presence, whilst upholding his transcendence, from the very moment of *creation*, means that Hebrew religious identity is not dependent on a particular geographical, national, or cultic circumstance; it transcends these without subverting the Hebrew identity. Its creation theology also envisages a new way of interacting with neighbouring cultures and theologies; Wisdom is present in *all of creation*. And, whilst this does not create the possibility of affirming a religious pluralism, it does legitimise the creative engagement with foreign cultures. This appears to be a very significant point. Even at this stage of Wisdom’s development as a theological concept, one of its rules of formation appear to necessitate creative engagement with the diverse riches of alternative cultures, in which one finds oneself inhabiting. The political, social and cultural ramifications of this point seem fairly extensive. Although these issues will continue to be explored throughout the thesis, one can note here that engrained within the very formation of the concept of Hebraic Wisdom is the theological justification of engaging with the world, both socially and intellectually with contemporaneous systems of thought, including philosophy, politics, religious ideas, and cosmological ones. For the Jewish community discussed here, Wisdom is able to affirm YHWH’s presence in the midst of an alien environment, uphold Jewish monotheism, offer a theodicy in face of these adversities,<sup>175</sup> and present itself as an alternative which will ‘guard you from the strange woman and the harlot’ (Prov, 7:5)

(לֹא תִשָּׁרָץ אֶת־הַנָּשִׁי הַזֶּה וְהָרְשָׁעָה הַזֹּאת); or uphold Hebraic identity in the face of the

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<sup>174</sup> R.E. Clements, *Wisdom in Theology*, Carlyle, 1992, p.26.

<sup>175</sup> Clements states that: ‘the very fact that wisdom offered the most universal and international body of teaching about life, morality and the nature of reality, made it the natural resource for coping with the new situation’ (R.E. Clements, *Wisdom in Theology*, p.25).

attractive alternatives apparent in the foreign environment now inhabited.<sup>176</sup> But, most crucially, offer the Hebrews a way of coping theologically, religiously, and culturally, with the circumstances that they now found themselves in.<sup>177</sup>

Therefore, we have offered an exegesis of *Proverbs 8:22-31* and established some of the fundamental themes concerning Wisdom's identity and its theological functions. We then compared these to other ancient Near Eastern parallels that were suggested to have informed and even occasioned its production, before concluding that these were not capable of explaining the origins or identity of the unique concept of the Hebraic Wisdom figure. Finally, we explored the socio-political context which contributed to this particular concept of Wisdom. We shall now explore the apocryphal appropriations of this concept of Hebraic Wisdom, beginning with Ben Sirach; repeating the same exegetical process as before, while continuing to add to the archaeological analysis of *Proverbs 8:22-31*, noting any fundamental developments that need to be added to the current concept of Hebraic Wisdom.

### **The Wisdom of Sirach 1:4-22, 24: An Archaeological Exegesis.**

Jesus ben Eleazar ben Sirach, the grandson of Sirach, identifies himself as the translator (from Hebrew to Greek) of his grandfather's great work. Ronald Murphy claims that there is 'universal agreement that Ben Sirach was actively engaged in his teaching and writing in the first part of the second century B.C.E.'<sup>178</sup> The work bares no indication of the turbulence that ensued in Palestine with Antiochus IV Epiphanes' rise to power in 175 B.C.E. which subsequently occasioned the Maccabean revolt and the desecration of the Temple in 167 B.C.E. Therefore, somewhere around 180 B.C.E. is typically suggested to be the likely date for the work. Sirach mentions 'Simon the high priest' (50:1-24), who is identified as Simeon II who held the priestly office from 219 -196 B.C.E. and describes his cultic performances as if he were an eye witness to the events themselves; giving further evidence to suggest that the dating is correct.<sup>179</sup> The work is assumed to have been produced in Jerusalem and Sirach is likely to have been from a high social

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<sup>176</sup> See: Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest and Prophet: religious and intellectual leadership in ancient Israel*, London, John Knox, 1995, pp.43-44.

<sup>177</sup> Sinnott, *The Personification of Wisdom*, pp.53-87.

<sup>178</sup> Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, p.65.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, p.65.

class. The two most significant chapters, with respect to the sapiential concerns at hand, are 1 and 24, to which we shall now explore.

Echoing *Proverbs* 8:22, Sirach affirms, in 1:4-9, that Wisdom was created before everything else by the Lord (προτέρα πάντων ἐκτίσται σοφία...κυριος αὐτος ἐκτίσεν αὐτήν), and that creation itself is infused with its presence; Wisdom has been ‘poured out over all his works’ (ἐξέχεεν αὐτήν ἐπὶ πάντα τὰ ἔργα αὐτου). Some scholars, such as R. Pautrel, have attempted to argue that Sirach’s Wisdom figure is related to Stoic conceptions of the *Logos*; an all pervading principle or element that is infused in worldly reality, directing and governing its movements. However, while some of Sirach’s references to Wisdom’s cosmic functions may resemble certain Hellenistic traits, there is no evidence that would suggest that he is consciously adopting such principles at the expense of his Hebrew affiliations; as Ben Witherington notes: ‘Ben Sirach uses this material [Stoicism] in the service of his own form of Jewish monotheism, however; he does not simply take over Stoic thought without alteration.’<sup>180</sup> Furthermore, as Karen Jobes has noted, Sirach says nothing here which could not be considered as a direct adoption of themes latent in *Proverbs* 8.<sup>181</sup> However, having noted this, while there are undoubtedly overt allusions to the Wisdom figure of *Proverbs* 8, Sirach’s Wisdom appears to be more passively involved with the creative act; it looks to be more at the disposal of God, rather than actively present before him.

In verse 14, it states that: ‘the *fear of the lord* (φοβείσθαι τόν κύριον) is the beginning of wisdom; she is created with the faithful in the womb.’ Not only is Sirach identifying Wisdom concretely with a specific theme, he also, in verse 15, goes on to affirm that she has established an eternal foundation with humanity (μετά ἀνθρώπων θεμελιον αἰώνος); abiding faithfully with their descendants. The significance and novelty of these positions are grounded in, what E.P. Sanders considers to be, their ‘incarnational overtones.’ This is the beginning of the figure of Wisdom being portrayed as something which is no longer abstract in a general doctrine of creation, but as ‘embodied’ concretely in both themes and history.<sup>182</sup> The ‘fear of the Lord’ is the most prominent theme associated with Wisdom at this stage, it is emphasised four times in the first chapter alone, the first having already been mentioned, and the following three include its

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<sup>180</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: the pilgrimage of wisdom*, Minneapolis, Fortress, 2000, p.81.

<sup>181</sup> Karen Jobes, ‘Sophia Christology: The Way of Wisdom’, in: J.I. Packer and S.K. Soderlund (eds), *The Way of Wisdom: Essays in Honour of Bruce Waltke*, Michigan, Harper, 2000, pp.226-251, p.232.

<sup>182</sup> See: E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 2009, p.332; Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: the pilgrimage of wisdom*, Minneapolis, Fortress, 2000, p.86.

association with: wisdom itself (v.16), the ‘crown of wisdom’ (στέφανος σοφίας v.18), and the ‘root of wisdom’ (ρίζα σοφίας v.20). James Crenshaw suggests that this specific identification, the first of three others, is indicative of a theme running throughout the entire work which is ‘sprinkled with explicit references and recognisable allusions to biblical persons and events.’<sup>183</sup>

In, what is often named, the ‘Wisdom hymn’ of chapter 24, this trend, of identifying the sapiential figure concretely, is given even more substance. Sirach has Wisdom announce that she has ‘come forth from the mouth of the most high and like mist covers the earth (ὡς ὁμίχλη κατεκάλυψα γην 14:3). Murphy suggests that he may be alluding to the Spirit or breath (Π ἦ Ὑ) of God that hovers along the water in *Gen 1:2*.<sup>184</sup> This reference is the closest Sirach comes to personifying Wisdom as a creative force working before God in a manner reminiscent of *Proverbs 8*. However, it is only an allusion, and elsewhere Sirach clearly portrays Wisdom as being absorbed into the creative and salvific actions of God himself. In verse 4, Wisdom declares that she has dwelt in the highest heavens and that her throne was in a *pillar of cloud* (ὁ θρόνος μου ἐν στύλῳ νεφέλης). This appears to be a direct reference to the pillar of cloud in *Exodus 13:21*, which is the means by which YHWH has chosen to accompany his sojourning people; it is indicative of embodied divine presence in salvation history. Wisdom is said to disclose this biographical information from the ‘assembly of the most high’ (24:2) which Murphy argues indicates that she is among the ‘heavenly court.’<sup>185</sup> Furthermore, she goes on to state, in verses 5-7, that she has ‘compassed the vault of heaven, traversed the depths of the abyss (βαθεὶ ὀβύσσων) – which refers to the pre-creation chaos of *Genesis 1:1* – and over all the earth and every people and nation she has looked for a dwelling place. That is, until, she is commanded by the Creator, in verse 8, who chooses a dwelling place for her tabernacle, he says: ‘pitch your tabernacle in Jacob’ (ἐν Ιακωβ κατασκηνώσον). Sirach has developed this ‘incarnational’ theme which is now, not only associated with the fear of the Lord or an abstract notion of humanity, but, more specifically and historically, with the *people of Israel* themselves. Interestingly, John the fourth Evangelist uses this same language of ‘pitching a tabernacle’ to denote incarnational themes in his prologue (1:14), he states that ‘the Word became flesh and

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<sup>183</sup> James Crenshaw, *The Old Testament Wisdom*, Atlanta, John Knox, 1981, p.150.

<sup>184</sup> Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, p.139.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, p.139.

*tabernacled* among us' (ἐσκηνώσεν ἐν ἡμῖν). Before briefly pausing to affirm Wisdom's pre-existence as a creature before the ages in verse 9, Sophia describes her specific roles amongst the people of Israel. She states in verse 10 that she ministers before God in the holy tent and that she has been established in Zion. John Collins notes that 'the passage is remarkable for its cultic emphasis. Wisdom finds expression in the cult of the Jerusalem temple.'<sup>186</sup> Λειτουργεω (to minister) is a description of Wisdom's function in the holy tent; it is typically associated with the performance of a public office.<sup>187</sup> There can be no doubt that Wisdom is specifically embodied, not only in the fear of the Lord or the people of Israel, but in the priestly and cultic services associated with the Jerusalem temple. C. Fletcher-Louis has claimed that Sirach is identifying the Wisdom figure with the 'Torah actualised in the Jerusalem temple cult and priesthood.'<sup>188</sup> He goes on to argue that one should read this manifestation of Wisdom's embodiment alongside Sirach's hymn in chapter 50 in praise of Simon ben Onias. Following the suggestions of C.T.R. Hayward, Fletcher-Louis claims that there is not merely a poetical parallel to be drawn from the comparison between these two respective chapters, but more potently, he argues that: 'in some way Simon in his cultic office embodies divine Wisdom.'<sup>189</sup> He suggests that this reading provides the most coherent explanation of 24:10, where Wisdom is described as 'ministering before the face of God in the holy tent (σκηνή ἁγιά): 'how can Wisdom have ministered as a priest in God's wilderness sanctuary? If Aaron and his sons embody Wisdom, then clearly she did so in the form of the human priesthood,' and not only in the human priesthood, but in specific human individuals such as Simon.<sup>190</sup> Whilst Sirach undoubtedly identifies the figure of Wisdom with the priestly office of the Jerusalem temple itself, it is difficult to conclude from the texts themselves that he intended to suggest that Simon himself was Wisdom embodied or en-fleshed. There is no compelling evidence that would indicate that the stylistic similarities of chapters 24 and 50 are anything more than poetical parallels. And, Wisdom ministering in the holy tent can also be explained on the basis of Sirach's general identification of the sapiential

<sup>186</sup> John Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1997, p.51.

<sup>187</sup> See: H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966, p.1036.

<sup>188</sup> C. Fletcher-Louis, 'Wisdom Christology and the Parting of the Ways Between Judaism and Christianity', in: Stanley Porter and Brook Pearson (eds), *Christian-Jewish Relations through the Centuries*, Sheffield, Roehampton, 2000, pp.52-69, p.54.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, pp.52-69, p.55; see also: C.T.R. Hayward, 'Sacrifice and World Order: Some Observations on Ben Sira's Attitude to the Temple service', in S.W. Sykes (ed), *Sacrifice and Redemption*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp.22-34, p.24.

<sup>190</sup> Fletcher-Louis, *Wisdom Christology*, pp.52-69, p.57.

figure with the cultic practices themselves and not necessarily in one specific individual. The reading of Sirach's identification of Wisdom with the cultic performances of the priestly office which are associated more broadly with the enactment of the law, rather than any one individual, make most sense in light of verses 11-12 and 23; the former claims that Wisdom has been given a resting place in, the more generic, 'beloved city' (πόλει ήγαπημένη) whilst, Jerusalem has become her 'domain' (εξουσία). And, as a result of which, she has taken root (ερριζωσα) in the Lord's inheritance.

While the latter, verse 23, announces that:

Ταύτα παντα βιβλος διαθήκης θεού ύψίστου, νομον όν ένετείλατο ήμίν Μωυσης κληρονομίαν συναγωγáis Ιακωβ.

'All this is the book of the covenant of God most high, the law that Moses commanded to us as an inheritance of the congregations of Jacob.'

It would therefore appear more reasonable to conclude that Sirach's identification of Wisdom with the priestly office is merely an extension of his culminating thesis: that Wisdom is ultimately embodied in the *Law of Moses* itself.<sup>191</sup>

However, despite Sirach's specific identifications of concrete and embodied Wisdom in the themes and history outlined above, this does not detract from the ultimate mystery of the sophianic figure and her functions. He is emphatically clear on this point. Just as she was not fully known by the first person, neither will she be fathomed by the last (28); as those who eat and drink of her will always hunger and thirst for more (21). But, if it is fair to say that an ultimate mystery encompasses her identity and function, there can be no doubt about the material and spiritual benefits which she bestows on those who are affiliated with her (13-17), illustrated by a host of comparisons drawn from Palestinian life: tall cedars, fruitful olive trees and so forth, all designed to represent blessings.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> See: J.C. Rylaarsdam, *Revelation in Jewish Wisdom Literature*, Chicago, University of Chicago, 1946, pp.18-46; Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine During the Early Hellenistic Period*, Wipf & Stock, 2003, pp.157-162; G.T. Sheppard, 'Wisdom and Torah: the Interpretation of Deuteronomy Underlying Sirach 24:23', in: G.A. Tuttle (ed), *Biblical and Near Eastern Studies: Essays in honour of William Sanford Lasor*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 1978, pp.166-178.

<sup>192</sup> Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, p.139.



We have already noted that suggested contexts for Sirach's figure of Wisdom have included Hellenistic philosophy. However, the general scholarly consensus is in line with these comments made by Crenshaw: 'Sirach's teachings...demonstrate a readiness to borrow Greek expressions and ideas, so long as they were subjected to a *thorough Hebraizing*.'<sup>193</sup> All of the concepts that have been suggested to imply Hellenistic borrowings on Sirach's behalf can just as easily be explained by his dependence on *Proverbs*. While Wisdom is infused into created reality as a governing force, a position which is not uncommon to *Proverbs*, she is also identified with unmistakable Hebraic themes such as the Law of Moses. At best, such suggestions can be indicative, as similar suggestions were in *Proverbs*, of neighbouring traditions being engaged with, adapted, and subordinated to the authors' specific concerns, which is a clear feature of the Wisdom tradition.

Crenshaw has suggested that Sirach's Wisdom has marked parallels in the contemporary Egyptian wisdom literature of his time; outlining several comprehensive stylistic examples.<sup>194</sup> However, as we have already seen in *Proverbs*, stylistic semblances can be indicative of a shared world view and that the author could have been familiar with the relevant literature, but this cannot imply that such conceptions can explain the origins of the specific ideas and concepts apparent in the sapiential text itself. J.T.H. Sanders has demonstrated that such parallels are more likely to be suggestive of the fact that Egyptian and Israelite Wisdom developed along similar lines, without necessarily pointing to a deliberate adoption of any specific theme by either one of the respective parties.<sup>195</sup> Murphy and Witherington have argued that the similarities are most likely coincidental given the fact that there is 'no evidence that it [the Demotic material] was ever translated into Hebrew or Greek in Ben Sira's age'<sup>196</sup>, meaning he would not have had access to the material.

Therefore, it would appear that the formation of Sirach's Wisdom can best be understood by his dependence on *Proverbs*, coupled with his own creative developments designed to meet the theological needs of his socio-political surroundings. Jobes puts it excellently when she exclaims that: 'the personification of Wisdom-Sophia in Sirach is so similar to *Proverbs* 8 in structure, theme, and even wording that it is most likely a deliberate development of the wisdom motif

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<sup>193</sup> James Crenshaw, *The Old Testament Wisdom*, Atlanta, John Knox, 1981, p.159. See also: Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: the pilgrimage of wisdom*, Minneapolis, Fortress, 2000, p.81.

<sup>194</sup> See: Crenshaw, *The Old Testament Wisdom*, pp.170-4.

<sup>195</sup> J.H.T. Sanders, *Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom*, California, Chico, 1983, pp.105-6.

<sup>196</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage*, p.82; Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, p.174.

found there.<sup>197</sup> We shall now briefly recapitulate just precisely how Sirach adapts the Wisdom figure of *Proverbs* 8 and what his creative engagement adds to the Hebraic concept of Wisdom outlined so far. In Foucauldian terms, we shall note the archaeological shifts and correlations within this unity of discourse.

The fundamental and regulative principles apparent in Sirach's sapiential theology are primarily developed from the concept which we identified in *Proverbs* 8. The first four points are in continuity with this same narrative and can be considered to be archaeological correlations.

- i) Wisdom is created by YHWH.
- ii) Her creation is not synonymous with the creation *par excellence*; she was 'before the ages,' although not as an independent entity distinct from the Creator.
- iii) She manifests the immanent presence of God.
- iv) She is mediatory; she comprises a *relationship* between God and the world that was established at the foundation of creation.

The archaeological shifts or Sirach's unique contribution to Wisdom's identity as a Hebraic concept and her theological functions are as follows:

- i) This same Wisdom is a relationship established by God between himself and creation that now has a *concrete* and *embodied* historical reality. She is identified with the more generic 'fear of the Lord' and Humanity *per se*, as well as the more specific 'people of Israel', the priestly enactment of the Mosaic Law and the Law of Moses itself.
- ii) If *Proverbs* established Wisdom as a personified relationship on the grounds of a creation theology, then Sirach identifies this relationship within history itself in the covenantal relationships that God has established with his chosen people. However, these are established

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<sup>197</sup> Karen Jobes, 'Sophia Christology: The Way of Wisdom', in: J.I. Packer and S.K. Soderlund (eds), *The Way of Wisdom: Essays in Honour of Bruce Waltke*, Michigan, Harper, 2000, pp.226-251, p.232.

from the act of creation itself. It establishes a correlation between creation theology and God's presence 'within' history.

iii) The historical embodiment of this relationship does not detract from its unfathomable nature; it is still ultimately a mystery.

In conclusion, Wisdom, as an abstract personified relationship, has been given a concrete identity within history. She has the same origin as outlined in *Proverbs* 8, and she performs the same tasks of communicating divine presence in an established mediatory relationship; only now, she has been shrouded in 'incarnational overtones' where she communicates divine presence in personal historical acts, whilst upholding the transcendence and mystery of the creator.

We shall now explore the socio-political setting or the formational context in which this concept has come into existence.

### **The Socio-Political Rules of Formation for Sirach's Wisdom Theology**

As we have already noted, Sirach would have most likely produced his work roughly around a decade before the turbulent events that occasioned the Maccabean revolt. However, even before this specific powerful cultural clash between Judaism and Hellenism, there would have already, undoubtedly, been tangible tensions between the respective traditions. Sinnott points out that: 'Jews were dealt with as outsiders in Hellenised Alexandrian society, and such treatment undermined their confidence in the power of their own traditions. Their God also seemed unable, or unwilling to save them from ridicule, and persecution.'<sup>198</sup> Needless to say, such circumstances would have severely tested the substance of Jewish identity, and there would have been a real temptation to explore the culture, philosophy, and religions associated with Hellenism, as potential alternatives to Judaism. These circumstances of Judaism being threatened by alien cultures and traditions bares stark similarities to the social and historical setting that necessitated the wisdom theology of *Proverbs*; it is, therefore, not surprising that Sirach re-appropriates this theology in order to meet the similar demands of his own environment. Martin Hengel notes that: 'there is an inner logic in this development in Jewish wisdom speculation, but we should ask whether a movement in this direction would have developed at all if it had not been furthered by

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<sup>198</sup> Sinnott, *The Personification of Wisdom*, p.133.

the necessity to ward off foreign influences...the decisive motive force [is] in the controversy with Hellenism.<sup>199</sup>

Sirach addresses many of the topical questions of his period, the nature of wisdom, the meaning of life, ethics, and so forth. However, he is at pains to present Judaism as an attractive tradition that resists the crude Hellenistic caricatures that often depicted it. Throughout the entire book, Sirach is constantly grounding wisdom in biblical motifs and in unmistakably Hebraic themes. The culmination of this process results in his identification of wisdom with the Jewish Law itself. In doing so, he is able to affirm that the Jewish Law, and the traditions associated with it, is a divine gift from God, something which one cannot obtain by human effort. He affirms that it is indicative of divine presence, and that it guarantees tangible benefits to those who adhere by it. But, most importantly of all, all of this is a property of Jewish culture and *not* Hellenism. Sirach presents Judaism as being superior to Hellenistic wisdom in an attempt, very much like that which was presented in *Proverbs*, to protect Jewish identity when it is threatened by foreign cultures. Wisdom needed to be embodied and even incarnated in Israel's history, customs, and law in a concrete manner in order to be able to appeal to an exclusive intimacy with the very thing that was so coveted by the surrounding cultures. However, this process still inaugurated creative engagement with this surrounding culture, even if the ultimate purpose was to claim these foreign ideas for Judaism itself.

Therefore, having explored the figure of Wisdom in Sirach and noted archaeological shifts and correlations to the current concept of Hebraic Wisdom, we shall now explore the next major adoption of Jewish sapiential theology: the Wisdom of Solomon.

### **The Wisdom of Solomon 6:1-10:21: An Archaeological Exegesis**

There is little if anything that can be ascertained about the author of the Wisdom of Solomon, other than the fact that it could not have been Solomon himself. The work is clearly dependent on the Greek translation of the Hebrew bible (Septuagint) which suggests that it could not have been composed before 200 B.C.E.<sup>200</sup> The most likely date is generally considered to be around the latter half of the first century B.C.E. Given pseudo-Solomon's familiarity with Greek ideas, coupled with his acquaintance with Egyptian culture (chapters 11-19), it is permissible to suggest

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<sup>199</sup> Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine During the Early Hellenistic Period*, Wipf & Stock, 2003, pp.157-62.

<sup>200</sup> Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, p.83.

that the work could have been composed in Alexandria. It was originally composed in Greek and is generally considered to be written by one Jewish author.<sup>201</sup>

Verses 1-12 of chapter 6 issue admonishments to use power wisely or face terrible eschatological consequences. The rhetoric itself suggests that it was composed for rulers and kings but, as Murphy notes, the author has ‘his own Jewish sisters and brothers in mind, and he wants to strengthen them in their traditions.’<sup>202</sup>

Verses 12-25 attach strong aesthetical motifs to the figure of wisdom; emphasising her as something to be desired. For instance, she is described as being ‘radiant’ or ‘bright’ (λαμπρά) and as ‘unfading’ (άμάραντος). These aesthetical connotations remain prevalent throughout every description of the figure.

Whilst she is to be sought, she herself also seeks out those who are worthy of her (14-16). This suggestion, that Wisdom works synergistically with humanity, responding and acting through those who desire her, appears peculiar to pseudo-Solomon. Whereas, in Sirach the beginning of Wisdom was the ‘fear of the Lord’, for pseudo-Solomon, her beginning is synonymous with the ‘true desire for instruction’ (άληθεστάτη παιδείας έπιθυμία, v. 17). And, if one is to love her, then they must keep her laws (18), and by keeping her laws one participates in indestructibility (άφθαρσία v.18); and if one obtains incorruption then, by it, they are brought near to God (19). For the first time in the sapiential literature, Wisdom is identified with eschatological promises of immortality and her role as a ‘relationship’, initially established in *Proverbs* 8 through creation, and in Sirach within history, is now, in pseudo-Solomon, one in being after material death. The influences of Hellenism have long been documented in various aspects of pseudo-Solomon’s work, and this notion of indestructibility or immortality is no exception. At first glance, it may appear that this is simply a direct borrowing from Hellenistic philosophy however, following closer inspection; such similarities are not as prevalent as one may have initially thought. It is important to note that immortality in Hellenistic thought is markedly *anthropological*; put simply, immortality is a natural property of the human soul. However, for pseudo-Solomon, immortality is necessarily an exclusive property of God and *not of humanity*; it is bestowed as a *gift* to humanity as a necessary ontological condition of the ‘friendship’ or relationship that he has established between himself and creation. James Reese puts it excellently

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<sup>201</sup>Ibid, p.84.

<sup>202</sup>Ibid.

when he states that: ‘the sage does not look upon immortality as a metaphysical entity. For him it is not the inherent indestructibility of the soul, as Platonic tradition conceived it, but rather a state of eternal, blessed communion with God and his saints.’<sup>203</sup> What is explicitly clear in pseudo-Solomon’s understanding of immortality is that it is something to strive and hope towards; an end that the author is attempting to encourage in his readers.

In chapter 7, the themes concerning Wisdom as something *given* by God (7), as well as engendering ‘friendship’ with him (14), are continued. One significant development that occurs within this chapter is the identification of Wisdom as a Spirit (πνεύμα σοφίας v.7).

Interestingly, the Stoics would often designate the world-soul under the simple guise of spirit.<sup>204</sup> However, here it appears to be the embryonic genesis of his later thesis that Wisdom is synonymous with God’s own Holy Spirit, which shall be discussed shortly. Continuing the theme developed by Sirach, pseudo-Solomon upholds Wisdom’s *subordination to God*; she is ‘guided’ (ὁδηγεῖ) by him (15).

So far, there have been fundamentally two significant archaeological shifts in the concept of Wisdom: the promise that Wisdom fashions an eschatological relationship (friendship) with God through immortality, and that she is identified as a Spirit. However, in the latter part of chapter 7, original developments appear thick and fast. Firstly, in v.22, pseudo-Solomon, injecting a whole new meaning into Wisdom’s creativity, states plainly that she is ‘the framer of everything’ (πάντων τεχνίτις). Before there is even chance to reflect on what has just been asserted, the author immediately launches into an extensive list of qualities that are embodied in Wisdom’s spirit (22). Of the most interesting attributes, she is designated, in v.23, as ‘all-powerful’ (παντοδυναμον) and ‘all-surveying’ (πανεπίσκοπον). Sophia appears to be beginning to be attributed with, what one might consider to be, typical divine qualities.

In v.24 she is claimed to ‘extend through and pervade everything by her pureness’ (δίηκει δέ καί χωρεῖ διά πάντων διά τήν καθαρότητα). One may initially be forgiven for jumping to the conclusion that this passage has been notably influenced by Stoic philosophy; wisdom being something akin to the ‘world-soul’. After all, there are some stark parallels, not only here, but also in so far as Wisdom is portrayed as a pervading entity on account of her purity, she passes

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<sup>203</sup> James Reese, *Hellenistic influences on the Book of Wisdom and Its Consequences*, Biblical Institute Press, 1970, p.62.

<sup>204</sup> Keimpe Algra, ‘Stoic Theology’, in: Brad Inwood (ed), *The Stoics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp.153-179, p.167.

into (descends) into worthy beings, and she is also a governing figure, all themes common to Stoic thought.<sup>205</sup> However, although Keimpe Algra has noted that Stoics were not unaccustomed to using dualistic language to describe, what was ultimately, their monistic deity as something ‘above’ the material world; this should not be understood to imply any notion of real transcendence: ‘any form of transcendent reality is rejected.’<sup>206</sup> It appears to be undeniable that pseudo-Solomon does conceive of God to be ontologically transcending the sapiential figure; Wisdom as an immanent presence is *not* God, God transcends her. Taking this point into consideration, if pseudo-Solomon is engaging with Stoic thought, he is doing so without compromising his Jewish faith; utilising it as a linguistic vehicle to convey Hebraic ideas in a Hellenistic culture.

Wisdom is also posited to be the ‘breath of the power of God’ (ἀτμίς<sup>207</sup> γάρ ἐστιν της τού θεού δυναμεως) as well as a pure emanation (ἀπορροια) of the *glory* of the Almighty (25). Verse 26 goes on to claim that Wisdom is an ‘effulgence’ (ἀπαύγασμα) of ‘eternal light’ and a ‘spotless mirror’ (ἑσοπτρον ἀκηλίδωτον) of God’s workings. Here, pseudo-Solomon appears to be moving, quite clearly, towards the adoption of hypostatic language in describing Wisdom, which is given even more emphasis when he extends the metaphor of reflection, and portrays Wisdom as an ‘image (εἰκών) of God’s *goodness*.’

Verse 27 claims that Wisdom is *one* but that she can do all possible things (πάντα δύναται); and ‘remaining within herself, she ‘makes all things new’ (πάντα καινίζει); passing over (μεταβαίνουσα) into every generation to ‘hallowed souls’ and making them ‘friends and prophets of God.’ As in Sirach before him, pseudo-Solomon is situating Wisdom within historical circumstances and having her draw people into a ‘friendship’ with God, one that cannot be overcome by evil (30).

Chapter 8 continues the theme of Wisdom as an all-pervading providential presence: ‘she stretches (διατείνει) robustly from boundary (περατος) to boundary and she manages/orders (διοικεί) all things properly (1). He then attempts to build upon his earlier articulations of Wisdom’s relationship to God, he affirms that she ‘lives with God’ (3), she ‘informs his works’ (ἀίρετις των εργαων αὐτού ν.4), and, even more forcibly, she is the cause/doer (ἐργαζομένης) and fashioner/designer (τεχνίτις) of everything (5-6). As we have seen already, pseudo-Solomon

<sup>205</sup>Ibid.

<sup>206</sup>Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> NRSV translates ἀτμίς as ‘breath,’ although it really indicates a vapour or some smokey or cloud like substance.

bears no thought to ascribing divine attributes to the figure of Wisdom, and now, moving some way beyond the creativity assigned to the sapiential figure in *Proverbs 8* and *Sirach 1* and *24*, he appears to attribute the act of creation itself to Wisdom.

He goes on to strongly emphasise Wisdom's role in mediating between God and creation. She shares an intimacy with both and is, therefore, able to communicate each to the other, for she herself embodies both in her very being. Just as before, her mediation is successful through her impartation of immortality and friendship with God. V. 13 states that 'out of her (Wisdom) I shall gain immortality (ἐξω δὲ αὐτήν αθανασίαν); and, similarly, in v.17 kinship (συγγενεία) with Wisdom ensures immortality. Towards the end of chapter 8, pseudo-Solomon once again affirms Wisdom's subordination to God; human acquisition of the figure depends entirely on God graciously *giving* her as a *gift* (χάρις v.21).

Chapter 9 is rich in hyperbolic description of Wisdom's attributes, glorious origins and highly articulated theological functions; but, most notable of all, is pseudo-Solomon's willingness to adopt Hellenistic philosophy. If there were hints of Stoicism in earlier chapters, then there is an abundance of positions that would explicitly suggest Hellenistic borrowings here. Firstly, he claims that the world was created through God's Word (ὁ ποιήσας τὰ πάντα ἐν λόγῳ v.1). Whereas, Wisdom is said to have a very specific role in the creation of humanity; she has fashioned them herself (κατασκευάσας ἄνθρωπον v.2). Wisdom is said to 'sit by God's throne (4) and, just as in *Proverbs* and *Sirach*, pseudo-Solomon claims that Wisdom was present with God before and during the creation itself, which implies that she has an intimate knowledge of the way that creation works (9). For this reason, she is able to teach humanity the ways of God, and pseudo-Solomon entreats God to send her from his throne of glory in the holy heavens for this purpose (10). She appears to be omniscient: for he claims that she 'knows' (οἶδε) and 'comprehends' (συνίει) everything (11). She is to be juxtaposed to earthly wisdom; for, without divine Wisdom, the former is futile and destined to come to nothing. Interestingly, the reason that earthly wisdom is ultimately worthless, according to pseudo-Solomon, is because the soul is weighed down by the destructible body which it inhabits (φθαρτόν γὰρ σῶμα βαρύνει ψυχήν v.15), and the 'earthly tent' (γεώδες σκῆνος v.15) hinders the thinking mind. There is an undeniable emphasis on a Greek soul or mind/body dualism, with the former being valued to the detriment of the latter. Verse 17 appears to state that, without Wisdom being sent to humanity, there is no way of knowing God's ways; she communicates and mediates knowledge of God's



purpose. Furthermore, she is seemingly synonymised with God's Holy Spirit (ἅγιόν σου πνεῦμα). Ben Witherington and Joseph Blenkinsopp have noted that this particular notion has close affinities with Philo of Alexandria, who makes the same affiliation.<sup>208</sup> However, whilst some scholars have utilised these parallels to suggest a similar dating to the respective writings, as Sinnott has noted, pseudo-Solomon 'appears to be unacquainted [at least directly] with the writings of Philo'<sup>209</sup> themselves.

The latter passages of chapter 10 begin to shed some light on the author's reasons for appealing to hypostatic language and divine attributes when portraying the figure of Wisdom; ultimately, they appear to be introduced for the purpose of the culminating thesis concerned with soteriology; Wisdom is salvific (σοφία ἐσωθησαν v.18). He illustrates how Wisdom has been soteriologically present within Hebrew history; he notes some events of great significance, such as: Adam's restitution (10:1), the deluge and Noah's rescue (10:4), and the deliverance of Exodus 10:15-21), each time emphasising that it was Wisdom who was delivering and drawing the Hebrews to God.

Gordon Fee has attempted to argue that pseudo-Solomon's portrayal of Sophia is characterised by a certain passivity; a divine attribute merely 'present' although not creatively and soteriologically active before and within creation: 'he [pseudo-Solomon] sees Wisdom as only *present* at creation, not as it's divine agent.'<sup>210</sup> However, it seems that if Fee's thesis is to work, it is going to depend on one fundamental hermeneutical decision; that is, within his proposal, Wisdom must appear to be nothing more than a personified attribute; a sort of surrogate for speaking about God's actions. This is seemingly the only possible way that Fee could read the type of passivity into the sapiential figure which would render her as a poetical substitution for God's activity. However, firstly, the meticulous precision in which pseudo-Solomon inserts Wisdom to perform specific theological functions within his narrative with such grandiose and unmistakably *hypostatic* language, seems to suggest that she is not merely a surrogate for divine activity; there is no other parallel to this within the rest of the sapiential literature for a start, and given how overtly hypostatic his sophianic figure appears to be, many scholars have even attempted to suggest that he must have borrowed these conventions from Egyptian goddess

<sup>208</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament: The Ordering of Life in Israel and Early Judaism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, p.149; Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage*, pp.100-1.

<sup>209</sup> Sinnott, *The Personification of Wisdom*, p.143.

<sup>210</sup> Gordon Fee, 'Wisdom Christology in Paul: A Dissenting View', in: J.I. Packer and S.K. Soderlund (eds), *The Way of Wisdom: Essays in Honour of Bruce K. Waltke*, Michigan, Harper, 2000, pp.251-80, p.264.

mythology. One need not necessarily agree with this thesis in order to recognise the importance of it being occasioned. For, this very enterprise itself seems to suggest that pseudo-Solomon is not presenting his audience with a simple and unambitious surrogate for God's activity, the hypostatic language latent within the text and the scholarly reception of the same betrays Fee's proposal; and seem to render it somewhat hard pressed.

As we have just noted, although his concern with soteriology is one explanation for Wisdom's appearance as a quasi-divine being in her own right, there are several others which we need to assess. The most typical suggestion, one that has hounded the sapiential literature throughout, is that it has been sourced from Egyptian mythology. We shall now explore several of these positions before outlining the various archaeological shifts and correlations to the Hebraic concept of Wisdom which we started with.

### **Rules of Formation: Cultural Influences**

As we have already noted, Hellenistic culture is clearly prevalent throughout pseudo-Solomon's presentation of the figure of Sophia. However, as we concluded earlier, although he almost certainly engages with the topical philosophical schools of his time, even using them to convey his own positions, it is very difficult to suggest that he has simply taken his understanding of God's Wisdom from these various schools. There were irreconcilable differences, in those instances where the author was appealing to Greek thought, between his own positions and the positions as they would have been understood by the Greeks themselves. On close inspection, his appeal to immortality, all-pervading and all-governing entities, and even his mind-body dualism, were not simply imported without filtration; in each instance he appears to have situated these ideas within his prevalent Hebraism. Therefore, we can suggest that pseudo-Solomon had a clear tendency to express his Hebraic ideas through the Hellenistic culture where he and his audience were situated, but, that this tendency does not warrant the conclusion that his portrayal of Wisdom was simply imported from these cultures, there is too much refinement in what is adopted to argue for this point. However, despite these arguments, one cannot escape the fact, as James Crenshaw has pointed out, that 'Wisdom goes beyond personification to hypostasis; she becomes a manifestation of God to human beings, an emanation of divine attributes.'<sup>211</sup> We are able to note, from our earlier expositions, that such a move never occurs in either *Proverbs* or

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<sup>211</sup> James Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, p.176.

*Ben Sirach*. This fact has led several scholars to the suggestion that pseudo-Solomon has been highly influenced (even to the point of enculturation) by the Hellenistic appropriation of the goddess Isis.<sup>212</sup> We shall now explore some of these claims.

There are, undoubtedly, stark stylistic and theological similarities between the sapiential figure in the *Wisdom of Solomon* and the Hellenistic portrayals of Isis. For instance, Isis is said to traverse the world and the heavenly host and ‘direct the world of men’<sup>213</sup> (compare with Wis 8:1, 9:11). Isis is ‘all-powerful’: ‘whatever I please, this too shall come to an end’<sup>214</sup> (compare with Wis 7:27). She is ‘one’<sup>215</sup> (compare with Wis 7:27) and she is ‘immortal’<sup>216</sup> (see: Wis 8:13-17). These are just some of the many similarities that are overtly apparent<sup>217</sup>; commonalities that have scholars such as Kloppenborg stating that the ‘similarity with Isis is here inescapable.’<sup>218</sup> However, for all the similarities that can be drawn between pseudo-Solomon’s portrayal of Sophia and the Isis aretalogies, as Sinnott argues: ‘this proves no more than that this text is an imitation of the hymn style generally and not necessarily in the form of an aretalogy.’<sup>219</sup> Significantly, where we would expect, if pseudo-Solomon was utilising Isis as a theological model, to find clear parallels between the two figures in the most significant constitutional aspects of their identities, we find *none*. For instance, as Witherington points out: ‘Sophia is neither identified with God, nor is she said to be the mother of a divine being such as Horus.’<sup>220</sup> If pseudo-Solomon was deliberately formulating his figure of Sophia with Isis as his model, surely we would expect them to, put crudely, ‘look more alike’ at the absolutely regulative and foundational points of their identities. Whilst, he liberally adopts hypostatic language when attributing divine qualities to Sophia, there is never any doubt that she is *not* God and that she is *subordinate* to him. She is given by God as a gift which constitutes a relationship between humanity and divinity. What we are left with, as in the instances before now, is that ‘the author of Wisdom possibly adopted, modified and adapted some patterns from Isis texts.’<sup>221</sup> However,

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<sup>212</sup> See: A. Di Lella, ‘Conservative and Progressive Theology’, in: *CBQ* 2; 1966, pp.135-54.

<sup>213</sup> deTraci Regula, *The Mysteries of Isis*, Llewellyn, 2001, p.71; Marvin Meyer (ed), *The Ancient Mysteries: a Sourcebook of Ancient Texts*, Harper Collins, 1987, p.172.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid..

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> For an extensive comparison see: Sinnott, *The Personification of Wisdom*, p.145.

<sup>218</sup> J.P. Kloppenborg, ‘Isis and Sophia in the Book of Wisdom’, in: *HTR* 75 1982, pp.57-84, p.67.

<sup>219</sup> Sinnott, *The Personification of Wisdom*, p.147.

<sup>220</sup> Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage*, p.108.

<sup>221</sup> Sinnott, *The Personification of Wisdom*, p.148.

when we pose the question as to whether Isis was constitutive in pseudo-Solomon's production of his sapiential figure, we are perhaps best to answer, along with Sinnott, that 'while parallels between Wisdom and Isis are possible, they do not constitute identification; careful scrutiny reveals their shallowness.'<sup>222</sup>

Therefore, we are able to conclude that, whilst there are close similarities between the sapiential figure that we encounter in the Wisdom of Solomon and Hellenistic philosophy as well as the Hellenistic appropriation of the Isis figure, these do not dictate the theological function or identification of Wisdom. Pseudo-Solomon is dependent on the earlier sapiential literature, as much as he is independent of them, in his willingness to engage with Hellenistic culture and express his Hebraic ideas in new and vibrant ways. What is certain is that, as Helmer Ringgren has noted, 'it is apparent that the author's [pseudo-Solomon] doctrine of wisdom is no carefully prepared and non-contradictory philosophic doctrine. Wisdom has an obscure position between personal being and principle. She is both, and she is neither the one nor the other.'<sup>223</sup> We shall now elucidate the significant archaeological shifts and correlations to the concept of Hebraic Wisdom.

Whilst there are undoubtedly strong similarities between pseudo-Solomon, *Proverbs 8* and *Sirach 1 and 24*, there are also notable and significant extensions, adaptations, and developments of some of their fundamental themes.

i) There are strong aesthetical themes attached to Wisdom: she is beautiful and naturally desirable; she seeks out those who desire her, for whom she makes herself readily accessible, working synergistically through the desire of those that seek her.

ii) The beginning of Wisdom, not here the fear of the Lord as it was for Sirach, is the true desire for instruction and teaching; when one follows her ways she engenders an *eschatological* relationship (friendship) between that person and God which is constituted by *immortality*.

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<sup>222</sup>Ibid, p.149.

<sup>223</sup> Helmer Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom: studies in the hypostatisation of divine qualities and functions in the ancient near east*, Lund, Ohlssons, 1947, p.119.

iii) She appears to go through a process of *hypostatic deification*. All of the ontological themes, apparent in *Proverbs 8* and *Sirach 1 and 24*, are extended and hyperbolised. She is the fashioner of all things; and especially of humanity. She is assigned unmistakable divine attributes such as omniscience and omnipotence; as well as being an emanation of God's glory and an image of his goodness: something hypostatically distinguishable from God himself.

iv) She is *subordinate* to God and she is given by him as a gift.

v) She is identified as God's 'Holy Spirit.'

vi) She is salvific; acting throughout Hebraic history, summoning Israel into an endless friendship with God.

Although these aspects of the concept of Wisdom appear to have shifted greatly from the original concept that we identified, Wisdom's theological functions, which are formative in the development of the concept itself are fundamentally unchanged, even if extended.

i) Wisdom is still, fundamentally, a personified relationship between God and creation. Only now, this relationship has been incorporated into eschatology and has extended the 'incarnational overtones' of this relationship, introduced by Sirach, to include hypostatic possibilities.

ii) The historical embodiment of this relationship has now been transformed into one that is ultimately salvific. Wisdom saves within history by her eschatological promises of immortality and friendship with God.

iii) Wisdom's role within creation, providence and salvation has been firmly established and the relationship which she embodies enacts all of those things; as relationship she participates, and in some respects, inaugurates creation, in so far as God's loving desire for the cosmos is creative in itself; the relationship is preservative – it tends and guides creation towards God's good ends; and it is also ultimately salvific, as it penetrates the cosmos and draws created reality into an eternal relationship with God.

### **The Socio-Political Rules of Formation.**

The Wisdom of Solomon is a work that truly reflects its historical and sociological settings. It was produced from the heart of the Jewish diaspora, heavily immersed in Hellenistic and Egyptian culture. Like Sirach before him, pseudo-Solomon had undoubtedly set himself the task of attempting to preserve Jewish identity, which found itself in the midst of the thriving philosophical, religious, and cultural surroundings of Hellenism. Put simply, he needed to justify the diaspora and theologically interpret the new circumstances that the Hebrews inhabited; where was YHWH in all of this, if he has not been faithful to us why should we be faithful to him?

In order to achieve the goal which he had set himself, he needed to present Jewish Wisdom as something aesthetically more desirable and beneficial than Hellenistic wisdom. He persistently utilises Greek and Egyptian ideas when portraying his sapiential figure, in the hope of highlighting their similarities as well as their surpassing differences, with the intention of suggesting that Jewish Wisdom can match Hellenistic and Egyptian wisdom on nearly every front and even surpass them. By noting how closely Jewish Wisdom resembled her surrounding foreign rivals, pseudo-Solomon was able to legitimise Jewish engagement with foreign culture – he himself embodies it in the work itself – and also proposes that they have been absorbed and surpassed by Jewish Wisdom itself; whom he calls upon to act as a guide for confused and culturally alienated Hebrews. So where is YHWH in all of this? He is actively present through Wisdom in delivering and saving Israel, as he always has been throughout, and in the most significant occasions of, their history. The soteriological motifs affirm Jewish identity and affirm God's saving presence in the environment in which they found themselves. The marriage of historical soteriology with eschatology appears to give hope to Jews who would have perhaps found it difficult to conceive of any sort of material deliverance in the circumstances which they inhabited and transferred this to an ultimate communion with God in immortality which could only be achieved by following the ways of Wisdom historically, which would have meant nothing more than faithfully upholding their Jewish heritage.

Having discussed in some detail the three major 'Hebraic' texts in which the concept of Jewish Wisdom was formed, we are now in a position to provide a current Hebraic concept of Wisdom, taking into consideration the archaeological findings of the above analysis.

### **The Concept of Hebraic Wisdom and its Rules of Formation**

The Concept of Wisdom, which the early Christian community went onto adopt and develop in their Christological proposals, shall be proposed on the basis of the archaeological study above, it will focus on how the sapiential figure functions theologically, what conditions the concept.

Wisdom mediates between God and the world in so far as she is a *relationship* between the Creator and his creation, as well as an *historical relationship* with Israel through embodied and tangible covenants and themes; and also one that extends after physical death through the impartation of immortality. Although it takes different manifestations, the relationship is *one and the same*, the embodied relationship manifested in the law is one that has been initiated by God since creation itself; similarly, the eschatological relationship in pseudo-Solomon is an extension and ‘end’ of the relationship brought forth in the act of creation. Therefore, the relationship, in its different guises, is typically personified as playing some sought of part in the creation of the cosmos; the relationship must have ‘preceded’ God’s creative act as his desire for creation, and must have even been creative itself in so far as God’s desire for the world brought it into being, and, yet, also it was simultaneously created, as it was *actualised* in time by the tangible presence of that which it was to relate to. Furthermore, the relationship is personified as providentially guiding creation, and eventually Israel, within history itself, and salvificly drawing them into an eschatological communion with God.

The need for personification (which moves towards hypostatic language in the Wisdom of Solomon) occurs because one has to be able to distinguish the relationship from God himself, the relationship is not divine. However, at the same time, it can never be conceived apart from God and is thus mysteriously inseparable from God himself; so Wisdom is properly said to participate in divine attributes and to pre-exist creation, as well as to participate in providence and salvation. However, just as fundamental to this relationship is creation, humanity, and Israel itself. Thus, she is simultaneously inseparable from created reality and can therefore be conceived as a creature manifesting finite attributes.

The relationship embodies both divinity and creatureliness simultaneously. Given the high doctrine of creation latent within the sapiential tradition, there is a certain amount of flexibility within the relationship. For, as everything is related to the Creator, from the very act of creation itself, all culture embodies ‘imprints’ of that origin. Therefore, Israel is permitted to engage with other cultures and utilise ideas without this compromising their exclusivity. However, whilst this

is the case, it is also true that she is intimately and somewhat exclusively related to a particular history through her embodiment in Israel's history itself. There is a specific correlation between creation theology, soteriology, and eschatology in the sapiential tradition itself.

Therefore, one can properly state that Wisdom is a creative theological invention, which is grounded in Hebraic thought, although communicated through and in relation to other cultural parallels. She was occasioned by a very specific set of historical and sociological contexts. It would appear then, that one can speak of a Hebraic concept of sapiential theology as constructed within the Old Testament and the Apocryphal texts. Let us now explore how this concept is transformed and further developed through a variety of rules of formation within the New Testament.

### **An Archaeology of Jewish Sapiential Theology as Appropriated by the New Testament Writers**

J.M.C. Scott remarked that: 'there can be little doubt that one of the earliest significant images used by the Christian Church to help define the relationship of Jesus to God was the Jewish figure of Wisdom.'<sup>224</sup> There is, perhaps, no greater confirmation of this position to be found within the New Testament than in the Pauline corpus; most significantly: *1 Corinthians* 8:6 and *Colossians* 1:15-20.<sup>225</sup> And amongst the Gospel writers, John stands out as the sapiential theologian *par excellence*. Whilst, there is evidence to support the suggestion that the Jewish wisdom tradition was utilised by some of the Synoptic Evangelists – especially Matthew<sup>226</sup> – their engagement appears far less extensive and less sophisticated in comparison to their

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<sup>224</sup> J.M.C. Scott, *Sophia and the Johanne Jesus*, Sheffield, JSOT, 1992, p.83.

<sup>225</sup> We can detect further instances of sapiential thought influencing 'Pauline' Christology: Hebrews 1:3 and scholars such as Ben Witherington and Jerome Murphy O'Connor have also argued that the 'Incarnational/Kenotic Christology' of Philippians 2:6-11 has been influenced by the Wisdom tradition; see: Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage*, p.263; J. Murphy O'Connor, 'Christological Anthropology in Phil, 2:6-11', *RB* 83, 1976, pp.25-50. However, in both instances the theological positions outlined in these texts are also embodied in the two which we have selected above.

<sup>226</sup> See: M. Jack Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology, and Law in Matthew's Gospel*, Harvard, 1970; Celia Deutsch, *Hidden Wisdom and the Easy Yoke: Wisdom, Torah, and Discipleship in Matthew 11:25-30*; Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage*, pp.341-368; Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (trans: J. Marsh), Oxford, Blackwell, 1972; J.M. Robinson, 'Jesus as *Sophos* and *Sophia*: Wisdom Tradition in the Gospels, in: R.L. Wilken (ed), *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity*, Notre Dame, 1975, pp.1-16; F. Brunett, *The Testament of Jesus-Sophia: A Redaction Critical Study of the Eschatological Discourse in Matthew*, Washington, University Press of America, 1979; W.P. Davies and D.C. Allison, *Matthew*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1988; and for recent critiques of these positions see: Simon Gathercole, *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark and Luke*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2006, pp.193-210.



Johannine counterpart;<sup>227</sup> which shall therefore function as the Gospel text of our analysis. Beginning then with Paul.

### **Paul's Wisdom Christology: *Corinthians 8:6*.**

Whilst Scholars such as J.G. Dunn have suggested that Paul's conceptual and linguistic allusions to the figure of Wisdom in 8:6 must be read in light of his 'identification' of Wisdom with Christ in 1 Cor 1-2;<sup>228</sup> it would appear that Fee is quite correct to claim that, given the context of the scenario, 'wisdom,' in this instance, is simply designating rationality with no intention of alluding to the Hebraic figure of Wisdom.<sup>229</sup> It is for this reason that our exegesis begins at 8:6, without reference to Paul's earlier discussion of 'wisdom.'

When addressing the issues surrounding Christians eating meat offered to idols, Paul affirms that they know that there are 'no idols in the world' (8:4) and that there is but *one God*. Noting that the world acknowledges many gods and many lords, Paul affirms, treating us to 'an extraordinary Christological moment, where he offers a deliberate Christian restatement of the Shema,'<sup>230</sup> that contrary to these conventions:

ἡμῖν εἰς θεός ὁ πατήρ, ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν, καὶ εἰς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς δι' αὐτοῦ (8:6).<sup>231</sup>

Although, many scholars have insisted that the Hebraic figure of Wisdom lies behind the logic of Paul's Christian restatement of the Shema, it has been something of a contentious issue.<sup>232</sup> After

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<sup>227</sup> Raymond Brown puts it excellently when he states that: 'in the Synoptics, Jesus' teaching shows a certain continuity with the ethical and moral teachings of the sages of the Wisdom literature; in John, Jesus is personified Wisdom' (Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, London, Anchor, 1966, p. CXXV).

<sup>228</sup> See: James. D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: a new testament inquiry into the origins of the doctrine of the incarnation*, London, SCM, 1980, p.182.

<sup>229</sup> See: Gordon Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study*, Massachusetts, Hendrickson, 2007, pp.106-107; also: Richard Hays, 'Wisdom According to Paul', in: Stephen Barton (ed), *Where Shall Wisdom be Found?*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1999, pp.111-125.

<sup>230</sup> Fee, *Pauline Christology*, p.89.

<sup>231</sup> 'To us [there is] one God – the Father – from whom all things come and we are for him, and one lord – Jesus Christ – through whom all things come and we through him.'

<sup>232</sup> Those scholars who suggest that Lady Wisdom is influencing Paul's Christology at this point include, for instance: C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, London, Adam and Charles Black, 1968, p.193; James. D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: a new testament inquiry into the origins of the doctrine of the incarnation*, London, SCM, 1980, p.182; James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1998, p.35; Richard Horsley, 'Background in the Confessional Formula of 1 Cor 8:6', in: *ZNW* 69

all, there is no explicit reference to Wisdom within the text itself – as already noted, 8:6 cannot be read in collaboration with chapters 1-2 - which has led many scholars to the conclusion that it is simply not the background to these Christological statements at all.<sup>233</sup>

Firstly, it is essential to highlight that we can be certain that Paul's restatement of the Shema, to incorporate Jesus within it, seems to occasion no challenge to his strict adherence to Jewish monotheism.<sup>234</sup> It would appear then, that the question of how Paul is able to affirm such a high Christology without engendering tensions within his own monotheistic convictions is the key to determining what lies at the base of these affirmations. Let us first take the argument that does not appeal to the sapiential tradition, championed by scholars such as Gordon Fee, A. Van Roon, and Richard Bauckham.<sup>235</sup> The argument can be conveniently summed up by Fee who claims that:

The Father has created all things through the agency of the Son, who as the one Lord is also – and now Paul's second point is being established – the agent of their redemption ('and we through him'). The whole passage therefore, typically for Paul, encloses the work of the Son within that of the Father; that is, the two διὰ phrases regarding the one Lord's role as agent of creation and redemption are (logically) framed by the ἐκ and εἰς phrases regarding the Father as the ultimate source and goal or purpose of all things – both creation and redemption.<sup>236</sup>

Just as the Father created the cosmos, so he has redeemed it and, by reversal, just as Christ has redeemed (participated in the Father's divine activity) us, so too must he have been active in creation. Fee is then bold to conclude that, from their common activity, 'this interchange in prepositions in itself indicates full identity of Christ with God.'<sup>237</sup> Therefore, by synonymising Christ with the Father, Jesus would inherently receive the attributes appropriate to full identification with divinity: pre-existence, a role in creation, and redemption; and, furthermore,

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(1978), P.132; N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1991, p.130.

<sup>233</sup> See: Neil Richardson, *Paul's language about God*, Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1994, p.296-304; Gordon Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study*, Massachusetts, Hendrickson, 2007, p.93.

<sup>234</sup> Fee, *Pauline Christology*, p.90.

<sup>235</sup> See: Gordon Fee, 'Wisdom Christology in Paul: A Dissenting View', in: J.I. Packer and S.K. Soderlund (eds), *The Way of Wisdom: Essays in Honour of Bruce K. Waltke*, Michigan, Harper, 2000, pp.251-80; Gordon Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study*, Massachusetts, Hendrickson, 2007, pp.594-618; Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament*, Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans, 1999, pp.37-41; A. Van Roon, 'The Relation Between Christ and the Wisdom of God According to Paul,' in: *Novum Testamentum 16* (1974), pp.207-239.

<sup>236</sup> Fee, *Pauline Christology*, pp.90-1.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid, p.92.

this same identification would explain why Paul's monotheism (as a good Sabellian in this portrait) is not affronted by his adaptation of the Shema to include Christ.

As logically straightforward as this thesis appears to be, it is not without its difficulties. Firstly, as Barrett has noted, the assumption that Paul has simply absorbed Christ into a synonymous identity with the Father appears ungrounded and against the general conventions of the larger Pauline corpus.<sup>238</sup> For instance, despite the contested *Rom 9:5* in the undisputable epistles and *Titus 2:13* in the pastorals, the consistent rule is that Paul reserves θεός exclusively for the Father, and he does this deliberately to denote *distinction*. Furthermore, such a move depends on two rather tenuous presuppositions. Firstly, one cannot identify Christ with the Father on the grounds of the Κύριος title alone. Undoubtedly, it was the Greek surrogate for YHWH in the LXX; but, as Barrett notes, crucially, 'it was also used in a variety of other senses; for example, it might be no more than 'Sir', used as a polite form of address. It is always important to note the context in which *Lord* is used. Here [8:6] it evidently stands in *close relation*, but is *not identical*, with God.'<sup>239</sup> Secondly, although Barrett concedes that the Father and the Son are not distinguished by their modes of operation (both share in the act of creation and redemption) they are, however, crucially distinguished by the 'prepositions *from* [ἐκ] and *to* [εἰς] of the one [Father], *through* [διὰ] of the other [Son]'.<sup>240</sup> We can conclude from the distinction of the prepositions - against Fee, and with Anthony Thiselton - that Christ is the '*means*' by which the Father's will is accomplished as *mediator*, in his messianic role; the presuppositions are not interchangeable, they are specific to the Father and the Son respectively.<sup>241</sup> If one accepts these arguments on this issue, it now becomes very difficult indeed to account for Paul's incorporation of Christ within the activity of God the Father, as a distinguishable agent in himself, without unhinging his strict adherence to his monotheistic foundation. Scholars of the stature of C.K. Barrett, James D G. Dunn, Roy Ciampa, Brian Rosner, N.T. Wright, and Richard Horsley, all seem to suggest that the *Jewish Wisdom tradition* is the best explanation for resolving these tensions and understanding Paul's Christological

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<sup>238</sup> C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, London, Adam and Charles Black, 1968, p.193.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans, 2000, p.636.

affirmations.<sup>242</sup> As we have already seen, the attributes which Paul wishes to ascribe to Christ, were already latent within the Old Testament and the Apocryphal presentations of Wisdom: she had a ‘role’ within the *act of creation* and was thus *pre-existent*; she was present within *salvation history*, and was salvific herself - *participating in YHWH’s activity*; furthermore, she could be distinguished from YHWH without the dissolution of Jewish monotheism, and she was fundamentally mediatory. All of these aspects seem entirely in concord with Paul’s Christology to the extent that it becomes permissible to suggest that this would have likely been his conceptual model for his restatement of the Shema. We need not go so far as Dunn does in suggesting that he would have expected his readers to recognise his allusions to Wisdom or, that they are dependent on his references from 1:18-2:5;<sup>243</sup> or even, that he is consciously restating the Jewish Wisdom tradition without theological adaptation. We are merely proposing that it is best understood as Paul’s conceptual model for incorporating the new requirements, occasioned by his belief in Jesus as God’s Messiah, into his Christian re-conception of Jewish monotheism. Although, Fee has attempted to argue that Wisdom was neither an agent in creation, redemption, or mediation – in an attempt to question the reality of Paul’s Wisdom Christology – we have already concluded that this is not the case in our first chapter and there is no need to rehearse these arguments.<sup>244</sup>

Some scholars, such as Hans Conzelmann, have suggested a Stoic background for Paul’s Christological affirmations; noting similarities, for instance, between Paul and Marcus Aurelius and Seneca.<sup>245</sup> However, despite some linguistic *similarities* (not identical utterances), the conceptual positions expressed by these formulas are markedly different and do not appear to have informed Paul’s Christology in this case.

Having discussed our first Pauline wisdom text, we shall now explore our second in Colossians 1:15-20.

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<sup>242</sup> See: Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p.193; Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, p.182; James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1998, p.35; Richard Horsley, ‘Background in the Confessional Formula of 1 Cor 8:6’, in: *ZNW 69 (1978)*, P.132; N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1991, p.130; Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2010, p.384.

<sup>243</sup> Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, p.182.

<sup>244</sup> See: Fee, *Pauline Christology*, pp.606-619.

<sup>245</sup> See: *Meditations 4:23 and Epistula 65:8*; Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Fortress Press, 1975, p.144.

### **Colossians 1:15-20.**

Colossians 1:15-20 is almost universally considered to be an elaboration of an early Christian ‘hymn.’<sup>246</sup> C.F.D. Moule once stated that: ‘if one were compelled to select the single most striking aspect of the letter to the Christians at Colossae, the choice would probably fall upon its description, in verses few but almost intolerably weighty, of *Christ* and of his *position in relation to the universe and the Church*.’<sup>247</sup> The Christology latent within the hymn appears to be necessitated through the ‘Judaizing’ and, perhaps even Gnostic tendencies (especially apparent in Paul’s concern with invisible cosmic forces) evident within the Colossian community and Paul’s attempt to refute them. Thus, Paul is eager to clarify Christ’s position in relation to God the Father and the cosmic forces in the heavens and on the earth. As Fee has noted, this same hymn appears to be – whether deliberate or not – an elaboration of the Christology found in *1 Cor* 8:6.<sup>248</sup> The various discussions concerning the authenticity of this epistle are of no relevance here. Firstly, that the epistle is an authentic expression of New Testament Christology is not disputed. Secondly, those who contest the sapiential origins of the Christological positions, outlined in the hymn, do so without reference to the debates concerning the authorship of the epistle.

The hymn itself consists of:

**15** ὃς ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως,

**16** ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, τὰ ὄρατά καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα, εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσία τὰ πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται

**17** καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν,

**18** καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος, τῆς ἐκκλησίας ὃς ἐστὶν ἀρχὴ, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, ἵνα γένηται ἐν πάσιν αὐτός πρωτεύων,

**19** ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκσεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι

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<sup>246</sup> See: John Barclay, *Colossians and Philemon*, Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1997, p.56.

<sup>247</sup> C.F.D. Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1958, p.3.

<sup>248</sup> Fee, *Pauline Christology*, p.299.

20 καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτὸν εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ, δι' αὐτοῦ εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.<sup>249</sup>

J.B. Lightfoot, the great eighteenth century biblical scholar, once noted that 1:15 is comprised of a twofold formula where the 'person of Christ is described first in relation more especially to Deity...and secondly in relation more especially to created things.'<sup>250</sup> As related to God the Father, Christ is said to be the 'image of the invisible God.' Frederick Bruce argues that 'No reader of the Old Testament Scriptures, on reading the words now before us [1:15] could fail to be reminded of the statement in *Gen 1:26-27* that God created man in his own image.'<sup>251</sup> One of the most significant arguments against reading Paul's Christological affirmations as an expansion of the wisdom tradition is, according to Fee, the ability to locate Paul's cosmic Christology entirely within his 'Son of God Christology, in which he uses biblical images from Genesis.'<sup>252</sup> Fee's point essentially argues that Paul is presenting Christ as the 'new Adam' who is the 'true image-bearer of God', which is confirmed by the initiation of the second strophe that upholds that Jesus is the beginning of the new creation.<sup>253</sup> However, if Paul's Christology can be comprehended exclusively through his 'new Adam' and 'Son of God' Christology, then one must be able to demonstrate that the language of 'image' is categorically dependent on its association with *Genesis 1:27*. Eduard Lohse has argued against this contention stating that: 'even though the term 'image' suggests *Gen 1:27*, it is out of the question to interpret it as a direct reference to the biblical account of creation.'<sup>254</sup> He believes that when considering that the image is said to be of the 'invisible' God 'the Hellenistic understanding of this term is to be

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<sup>249</sup> 'Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; that in him it was created, everything; in the heavens and on the earth – the visible and the invisible – whether thrones, lordships, rulers, or powers, everything were created through him and for him and he is before everything and everything, in him, is consisted. he is the head of the body – the Church – who is the beginning, the first born out of the dead, in order that he may hold the first place in everything; that in him he was pleased that all the fullness should dwell, and through him, to reconcile all things to him – by making peace by the blood of his cross – whether on earth or in the heavens.'

<sup>250</sup> J.B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, London, Macmillan, 1879, p.144.

<sup>251</sup> Frederick Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, Philemon, and the Ephesians*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 1984, p.58.

<sup>252</sup> Fee, *Pauline Christology*, p.325.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, p.299.

<sup>254</sup> Eduard Lohse, *A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, Fortress Press, 1975, p.46.

assumed.’<sup>255</sup> Jerry Sumney has lent support for Lohse’s argument on account that ‘invisibility,’ as an attribute of God, does not appear to be a product of the Hebrew faith but, rather, a Hellenistic affirmation of transcendence.<sup>256</sup> Furthermore, David Garland has argued that the possibility of affirming the reality of an image of an invisible deity can only occur if ‘image’ is understood in the Hellenistic sense: ‘in Greek philosophy...the image has a share in the reality that it reveals,’ and that without assuming this context, the proposition would make little sense.<sup>257</sup> Similarly, Eduard Schweizer claims that when one takes the ‘image’ language in correlation with Christ participating in the creative act, Christ must be ‘designated ‘image of God here in a sense different from 3:10 which speaks of the new person in Christ who is being renewed ‘after the image’ of the creator.’<sup>258</sup> If we assume that Paul is using ‘image’ in its Hellenistic context – and there are good reasons for doing so - then the only Jewish parallel to this convention is found in the Apocryphal presentation of Wisdom. And, when considering how closely paralleled Paul’s portrayal of Christ is with the figure of Wisdom in these texts, it is more than permissible to propose such a context as constituting the background of his Christological affirmations.

Wisdom is described by Pseudo-Solomon in 7:26 as being the image of God’s goodness (εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ).<sup>259</sup> Fee states emphatically that this portrayal does not ‘come close to what Paul says in Col 1:15 of God’s Son.’<sup>260</sup> Whilst an image of God’s goodness and an image of the invisible God are not conceptually synonymous, the parallels are still overt; something which Fee refuses to acknowledge on the grounds that it is not related to the Hebraic use of image in *Genesis 1:27*. However, to rule out these parallels on the *a priori* contention that Paul’s Christology must be read in light of *Genesis 1:27*, seems somewhat arbitrary, especially considering that the hymn itself appears to point to a Hellenistic adoption of the ‘image’ language. Furthermore, these similarities gain even more momentum when we consider how Paul has chosen to express Christ’s relationship to creation. We are told that Jesus is the ‘firstborn of all creation.’ As we saw above, such a designation is so fundamental to the figure of

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<sup>255</sup>Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Jerry Sumney, *Colossians*, Westminster, John Knox, 2008, pp.63-4.

<sup>257</sup> David Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, Michigan, Zondervan, 1998, p.87.

<sup>258</sup> Eduard Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians*, London, SPCK, 1982, p.66.

<sup>259</sup> Other examples, which parallel this convention, from Hellenistic Judaism would include Philo of Alexandria who claims that Wisdom is the image of God (Leg. All. 1:43).

<sup>260</sup> Fee, *Pauline Christology*, p.325.

Wisdom in the Jewish sapiential tradition: *Prov* 8:22, *Sir* 1:4, 24:9. Although, Fee has recently argued that:

πρωτότοκος occurs nowhere in the entire wisdom tradition...the texts brought forward *Prov* 8:22, 25, not only have quite different words in the Septuagint, but also their point...is something considerably different from Paul's use of πρωτότοκος here, where Christ *as Son* holds the rights of primogeniture with regard to every created thing, since they were all created *in* him and *through* him and *for* him.<sup>261</sup>

However, although Fee is right to note some linguistic differences between the texts (although προτέρω and πρωτότοκος are certainly not synonymous, in these contexts both seem to point to cosmic priority), to suggest that the only 'proof' of Paul utilising the wisdom tradition would be an exact linguistic replica appears unreasonable and seems to incredulously rule out the possibility of Paul creatively engaging with Hebraic themes in a manner that is so typical of Pauline theology. Ralph Martin appears to hint at this tension in Fee's arguments when he states that: 'there is a virtual by-passing of Paul's use and adaptation of the traditions he received.'<sup>262</sup> Conceptually, the positions are almost inseparable; in each instance cosmic pre-existence is designed to affirm the superiority of Wisdom and Christ respectively above all other creatures, on the ground that they participate in the creative act, or the creation is engendered through them respectively.<sup>263</sup>

1:16 affirms the triplex formula of creation occurring *in*, *through*, and *for* Christ. The first two positions have clear precedents in the Hebraic wisdom writings. *Prov* 3:19 states that the earth was created in Wisdom (חָכְמָה); Philo affirms that it is by the means of mother Wisdom that the universe came into being (μητρὸς δὲ σοφίας, δι' ἧς τὰ ὅλα ἦλθεν εἰς γένεσιν).<sup>264</sup> Although there is no explicit reference to creation being made for Wisdom, there is a sense in which creation was created for the purposes of participating in the relationship that God had established in Wisdom.

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<sup>261</sup>Ibid, p. 320.

<sup>262</sup> Ralph Martin, 'Review of Gordon Fee's Pauline Christology', in: *Interpretations* 63:1 Jan 2009, pp.74-78, p.76.

<sup>263</sup>See: Helmut Merklein, 'Zur Entstehung der Urchristlichen Aussage vom Präexistenten Sohn Gottes', in: Gerhard Dautzenberg (ed), *Zur Geschichte des Urchristentums*, Basel, Herder, 1979, pp.33-62, p.53.

<sup>264</sup> *De Fuga et Inventione* 109, in: Jeffrey Henderson (ed), *Philo V (LOEB)*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001, p.68.



Many scholars also note the strong parallels between Paul's triplex formula and Stoic philosophy.<sup>265</sup> For instance, Marcus Aurelius states: 'O nature, everything is from you, in you, and for you' (ὦ φύσις, ἐκ σοῦ πάντα, ἐν σοί πάντα, εἰς σὲ πάντα *Meditations* 4:19).<sup>266</sup> Interestingly, as we noted above, Wisdom – especially in pseudo-Solomon – when expressed with very similar all-pervading connotations, was also thought to have been borrowing its vocabulary from Stoic philosophy. It is perhaps not out of the question to suggest that Paul has inherited these traits from Hellenistic Judaism more broadly. Whichever way around, it appears that Christ is performing the same mediatory role in the act of creation, salvation, and eschatology, as Wisdom does. As Lohse notes, the unity of these three fundamental themes are only held together in Hebraic thought by the myth of Wisdom; a role which Paul is now attributing to the person of Christ.<sup>267</sup>

1:17 appears to be something of a synthesis between the positions expressed in verses 15 and 16; emphasising the fundamental point about Christ's pre-existence and his lordship over creation, as well as his all-pervading presence; again maintaining, in typical sapiential fashion, that Christ was prior to all created reality.

In 1:18, Paul creatively adapts the sapiential tendencies so to include Christ's redemptive act. Christ is not only the 'firstborn' of creation; he is also the 'beginning' and 'firstborn' from the dead, and that this is the case, so that in 'all things' Christ may have pre-eminence; that is, not only is he ontologically prior to all created reality in respect to their origin, he also has this same distinction within the economy of redemption as the head or beginning of the 'new creation' which, as in the first, is accomplished in and through Christ.<sup>268</sup>

In 1:19 Paul seemingly affirms a confession of an incarnation. Depending, of course, on how one interprets the ambiguous πλήρωμα,<sup>269</sup> it is generally taken in correlation with 2:9 and considered to be an articulation of the incarnation.<sup>270</sup> Wisdom's embodiment within history and the economy of salvation was well documented in the Hebraic concept of Wisdom, and it would

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<sup>265</sup> See: Lohse, *A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, p.49; Eduard Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians*, London, SPCK, 1982, p.69.

<sup>266</sup> C.R. Haines (ed), *Marcus Aurelius Books 1-12: 58 Loeb*, Harvard University Press, 1930, p.77.

<sup>267</sup> Lohse, *A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, p.48.

<sup>268</sup> C.F.D. Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1958, p.69.

<sup>269</sup> For a detailed discussion on the complexities of this term see: Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, pp.164-69.

<sup>270</sup> Margaret MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, Minnesota, Liturgical Press, 2008, p.67.

appear that we find an expression of it here. Only now Paul has located redemption in the very person of Jesus Christ, as Margaret MacDonald notes: ‘the Christ hymn of Colossians 1:15-20 anchors traditions about divine Wisdom firmly in history by stressing the relationship between the death of Christ and the reconciliation of the universe, and by highlighting the indwelling of Christ in the Church.’<sup>271</sup> Scholars such as Seyoon Kim, Eckhard Schnabel, M. Bockmuehl, and C.M. Pate have all argued, in their unique ways, that Paul’s development of the theme of incarnation is dependent on Jewish speculation about the Torah as embodied Wisdom. With Torah conceived as embodied Wisdom, and Paul’s emphasis on the fact that Christ has replaced the Law, it was only natural, according to the scholars above, that Christ would inherit the functions of Wisdom that had been previously associated with her exclusively.<sup>272</sup>

Finally, 1:20 affirms that Christ’s soteriological mediation – bringing the Father and creation together in himself – is achieved through the ‘peace’ and reconciliation’ wrought through the blood of his cross.

Therefore, having explored Paul’s cosmic Christology apparent in his adoption of this early Christian hymn, it would appear that it is best understood as an appropriation of the Jewish wisdom tradition and therefore as a Wisdom Christology. Although Fee had argued that there was little evidence to support Paul’s dependency on the wisdom tradition, it appears that, with our myriad of examples, this contention is simply not sustainable. Paul’s high Christology seemed to parallel conventions within the wisdom tradition so closely on a theological, conceptual, and (although to a lesser extent) linguistic level, that they could simply not be ignored. The similarities are so apparent that scholars such as Mary Rose D’Angelo have even been led to suggest that this early Christian hymn was in fact first formulated as a hymn to Sophia and later adapted to Christ.<sup>273</sup> We need not agree with her proposal to appreciate the circumstances that substantiate such a claim.

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<sup>271</sup>Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> See: Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul’s Gospel*, Tübingen, 1981, p.127; Eckhard Schnabel, ‘Wisdom’, in: G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin, and D. Reid (eds), *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, Intervarsity Press, 1993, pp.967-73; M. Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity*, Tübingen, 1990, p.153; C.M. Pate, *The Reverse of the Curse: Paul, Wisdom, and the Law*, Tübingen, Siebeck, 2000.

<sup>273</sup> See: Mary Rose D’Angelo, ‘Colossians’, in: Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (ed), *Searching the Scriptures 2: a Feminist Commentary*, New York, Crossroad, 1993, pp.313-24.

It is important to note that in emphasising Paul's 'wisdom Christology' we are not suggesting that he has passively restated the rudiments of the wisdom tradition and merely swapped Sophia for Christ. The portrait we have of Paul the theologian seems to suggest a dynamic synthesiser of Jewish ideas and themes adapted to his experience of the risen Christ and what this then means for his faith and theology. Much of his theological writing is an attempt to come to terms with and articulate the risen Lord. And Wisdom is not his only means of exercising this vocation – it is not, and does not have to be, an either or scenario – as Marianne Thompson highlights: Paul may have had both a 'new Adam' Christology and the sapiential tradition in the back of his mind, when utilising this early hymn.<sup>274</sup> Martin Hengel also emphasises this point concerning the non-exclusivity of Paul's use of the wisdom tradition: 'it was natural that the exalted *Son of God* also attracted to himself the functions of Jewish Wisdom as a mediator in creation and salvation.'<sup>275</sup>

Let us now briefly recapitulate the Pauline concept of Hebraic Wisdom and its theological rules of formation.

I) There is one Lord Jesus Christ who is related to God the Father and Creation in a *mediatory capacity*.

His relationship to God the Father can be constructed as follows:

- a) Christ as *instrument* of the Father's activity in Creation. The cosmos is created by the Father *through* the Son and *for* the Father (1cor 8:6) and also *for* the Son (Col 1:16) in so far as he is for the Father. Not only is creation made through the Son but it is also held together in him, to the extent that everything is inherently related to him from the origin of their creation.
- b) Christ is the *instrument* of the Father's activity in his economy ('we through him' *1 Cor* 8:6); Christ is the means by which the Father inaugurates the 'new creation' through his resurrection ('first born out of the dead' *Col* 1:18).
- c) Christ is described as being the *image* of the 'invisible God' (*Col* 1:15). Christ, in his capacity to mediate the Father's activity, also participates in his Being (although he is not synonymous with the Father: it is not an early formulation of what we might now consider to be 'modalism').

<sup>274</sup> Marianne Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2005, pp.28-9.

<sup>275</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Son of God: the origin of Christology and the History of Jewish Hellenistic Religion* (trans:J. Bowden), London, SCM, 1976, p.113.

He is *distinguished* from the Father without such a distinction compromising his participation in the divine Being. Christ is also the *historical embodiment* (as image) of the ‘fullness’ of divinity.

His relationship to the cosmos can be formulated thus:

a) He has ontological precedence (‘firstborn of all creation’ *Col 1:15, 17*) over creation in two instances: firstly, he pre-exists the cosmos due to his instrumental role in its creation; secondly, he is the ‘firstborn of the dead’ *Col 1:18* and is the means by which we are *eschatologically* invited into communion with God by participating in his resurrection; itself, conditioned by the peace and reconciliation wrought through his blood and sacrifice on the cross.

II) Christ’s mediation between God the Father and the cosmos extends through its creation, its salvation, and its end; all things occur through, and are held together in, Christ himself.

III) Christ’s historical person is also a universal *relationship* between God the Father and the cosmos. We are for the Father in all things in so far as we are for Christ and are graciously invited to participate in *his* relationship to the Father; achieved through the triplex mediation in creation, salvation and eschatology; although, Paul’s order can be formulated as salvation then eschatology then posthumously (through theological reflection) pre-existence and therefore creation.

We shall briefly explore the archaeological shifts and correlations between the Hebraic concept of Wisdom and the Pauline adoption of this same tradition.

Wisdom and Christ both perform the same theological function of *mediation* between God and creation in three identical instances. Wisdom and Christ both pre-exist finite reality, to the extent in which they both perform some sort of mediatory role in the act of creation itself. Wisdom’s creativity is more ambiguous than, and not as explicit as, Christ’s - but this does not warrant the identification of a ‘new’ function. Wisdom, as a communication of divine presence, is embodied within history (Torah in Sirach, and she is said to be salvifically involved throughout Hebrew history by pseudo-Solomon) with the purposes of inaugurating a relationship between Israel and God. Christ is the historical and now hypostatic embodiment of divinity and actualises our redemption (through the cross and the resurrection; not the law) initiating a ‘new’ relationship

between the Father and creation through Christ's acts which permit our participation in his relationship to the Father.

Within the Hebraic concept of Wisdom, the theological order is: participation in the act of creation (pre-existence), embodied presence within history (salvation), and eschatological invitation, through the impartation of immortality, to commune with God after death. For Paul, the order is slightly different: encounter with the resurrected Christ (soteriology and eschatology) re-conceived appreciation of the cross as the means by which we are permitted to participate in the resurrection (strictly soteriology), then an acknowledgement of Christ embodying divinity (the requirements for participating in the divine economy) and then an extension to creation theology. Not only are Christ's functions identical to Wisdom's but this tradition would have also provided Paul with the conceptual framework to affirm all of these positions.

We shall now explore the Wisdom's position within our Gospel text.

### **Johannine Wisdom Christology.**

Raymond Brown once commented on the uniqueness of John's Christology and subsequently concluded that: 'the Evangelist has capitalised on an *identification of Jesus with personified divine Wisdom as described in the Old Testament*.'<sup>276</sup> If Brown's suggestion is correct, then we may confidently conclude that the fourth Evangelist provides us with the most theologically sophisticated wisdom Christology to emerge out of the New Testament texts. While many have proposed numerous stylistic similarities<sup>277</sup> between John's Christ and the figure of Wisdom, as well as Pneumatological parallels between Sophia and the Holy Spirit, our assessment of John's Christology shall be confined to the positions articulated within his Prologue; predominantly because it is here that the Evangelist offers the fullest expression (and summary) of his high Christology. Given the centrality of the *Logos* within John's Prologue, we will have to attempt an archaeological investigation into this theme; as this would seem to be the key to determining whether the Prologue is an articulation of wisdom Christology or not. After outlining the rules of

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<sup>276</sup>Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, London, Anchor, 1966, p.CXXII (my emphasis).

<sup>277</sup> For instance, Stephen Barton notes the commonality between the first person discourses in both Christ and Wisdom (Stephen Barton, 'Gospel Wisdom', in: Stephen Barton (ed), *Where Shall Wisdom be Found?*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1999, pp.93-111, p.107). Brown also notes the common use of symbols, associated with food, given in instruction between Christ and Wisdom, as well as the similarities between the Paraclete and Sophia in their ability to be sent and penetrate corporeal reality and humanity and bring people to true understanding (Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, p.CXXIV).

formation for the concept of the *Logos* in *John 1-18*, we shall then explore the conceptual contexts for John's Word, with specific reference to the Hebraic wisdom tradition.

### **John's Prologue: An Archaeological exegesis of the *Logos***

Donald Arthur Carson has noted that 'the Prologue is a foyer to the rest of the Fourth Gospel, simultaneously drawing the reader in and introducing the major themes.'<sup>278</sup> Given how closely the Gospel proper is related to the Prologue, it is permissible to conclude that they are written by the same author; although, some have contested this view in light of certain peculiarities.<sup>279</sup> Many scholars have suggested that the Prologue is the product of an early hymn or poem (either Christian or non-Christian) reworked by John to meet his theological needs<sup>280</sup> – typically considered to consist of four strophes and a large chiasm<sup>281</sup> – however, some scholars reject this categorisation as the Prologue does not appear to reflect the typical conventions of Greek poetry; neither are such scholars convinced by the suggestion that the 'poetical' occurrences are based on Hebrew or Aramaic conventions. In such instances, the designation 'rhythmical prose' is preferred. Whether the literary basis of the Prologue was original or borrowed, as Carson argues: it has 'been so thoroughly re-worked and woven into a fabric of fresh design that there are no unambiguous seams.'<sup>282</sup> Put simply, even if the Prologue were not original to John, he has absorbed it into his own idiom to such a great extent that it is difficult to remove it from this context.

The Prologue initiates by patterning for itself the 'Εν ἀρχῇ of *Genesis* in the LXX. However, rather than narrating the origins of creation, the Evangelist is describing the 'genesis' of the Word with specific emphasis on his relationship to God. We are told that the Word was with God in the beginning and, even more profoundly, that the Word was God. There is a pivotal grammatical disputation in v.1 that directly effects the way in which the Evangelist's intentions are interpreted. Some scholars, such as Charles Harold Dodd,<sup>283</sup> have suggested that there is an ontological distinction to be made between *the* God and god within John 1:1 and, that the Word

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<sup>278</sup> Donald Arthur Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 1991, p.111.

<sup>279</sup> See: Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John I*, Herder, 1968, pp.227, 231.

<sup>280</sup> See: Andrew Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, London, Continuum, 2005, p.93.

<sup>281</sup> See: Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, p.3; Alan Culpepper, *NTS 27 (1980-81)*, pp.1-31.

<sup>282</sup> Donald Arthur Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 1991, p.12.

<sup>283</sup> Charles Harold Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1953, p.276. One can deduce, from Dodd's comparison of John with Philo, that he implies such a distinction between God and god in John 1; J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2010, p.48.

is described as the latter at the expense of *not* being the former. The argument hinges on the absence of the definitive article before θεός. Firstly, we are told that ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς **τὸν θεόν** but, it is then stated, in apparent contrast, that: καὶ **θεός** ἦν ὁ λόγος. As Brown elucidates, some have suggested that the distinction can be explained away on the basis that, generally speaking, predicate nouns tend to be anarthrous; however, Brown also notes that ‘such a rule does not necessarily hold for a statement of identity’<sup>284</sup> which is what appears to be meant in John 1:1. Although, even with these points considered, it would surely appear unreasonable to suggest that John has deliberately omitted the article to highlight an ontological inferiority of the Word in respect to *the* God, given that Jesus (who is the Word) is identified with *the* God on several other occasions within the Gospel (e.g. the ‘I AM sayings’ and Thomas’ affirmation of Jesus being – literally – ‘the Lord of me and *the* God of me;’ the article included in *John* 20:28). If such a distinction were deliberately inserted to denote ontological inferiority then, surely, such a crucial distinction would have been upheld, and not contradicted, within the rest of the Gospel. Therefore, it would seem that we are able to acknowledge a monumental development in New Testament Christology: the Word is fully designated as being *the* God.

Lending support to this conclusion, John then states plainly, in v.3 that the Word is instrumental in the creation of the world: ‘In him everything came to be and apart from him nothing that is has become.’

John informs us, in v.5, that the ‘light shines’ in the darkness and we are forewarned – as John writes with hindsight - that the light was not overtook (κατέλαβεν) by darkness.

From vv.6-9, we are told of the role of John the Baptist, who has come to witness to the light but is not himself the light.

We then encounter, in v.9: Ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον, **ἐρχόμενον** [participle] εἰς τὸν κόσμον. Some would take the ‘Word’ as the antecedent to this sentence and thus read it to imply that ‘he (the Word) was the true light, which enlightens every man.’ However, as Brown points out, if this is the case, then the participle ‘coming’ looks markedly out of place and has to be supplemented with another ‘he was.’<sup>285</sup> It would appear then that it would make more sense to propose that John is claiming that there is a true light, which is the light of every man, coming into the world. However, scholars such as J. Ramsey Michaels

<sup>284</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, p.5.

<sup>285</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, p.9.

choose to read the participle in relation to the phrase that immediately precedes it; giving us: ‘the light was true that illumines every human being coming into the world. The precedent for reading it in this way is that ‘all who come into the world’ is an idiomatic phrase encountered frequently in the rabbinic literature<sup>286</sup> to denote ‘everyone.’ However, ‘coming into the world’ is typically reserved for Jesus in John and not a generic description of all people (e.g. *John 3:19*) and when taken in collaboration with the Evangelist’s insistence that John the Baptist is not the light, we can clearly see the logic of the contrast: the true light (Jesus) is coming into the world.<sup>287</sup>

John’s next use of ἦν, in v.10, refers back to the ‘Word’ and he reaffirms the position outlined in v.3 that the world has come into being through the agency of the Word, but despite this the world failed to recognise him (1:10-11).

In v.12, more of the Word’s theological functions are outlined. It is claimed that he gives power (ἐξουσίαν) to those who receive him and believe in his name to become children of God (τέκνα θεοῦ). From the conditional clause apparent within the sentence, we are able to note that this gift must be received in order for it to take effect; it presupposes a synergy between the Word’s actions and the receptiveness of those acted on. One can draw a parallel here with the functions of Wisdom in *Wisdom 6:14-16*. She requires the desire (willingness and acceptance) of individuals for her in order to work through them. Although, μονογενής is used exclusively of the Word to articulate his relationship to the Father as *only Son*, in contrast to τέκνα θεοῦ for those who come to believe in his name, there is a sense in which the latter presupposes the former; it is because of the Word’s relationship to the Father that he is able to give power to those who believe in him to partake in his own relationship; making them children of God.

V.13 claims that this gift (becoming children of God) is removed from the conventions of physical birth (neither through blood, nor the act of procreation, or at the discretion of any one person) and entirely dependent on God; as well as indicating the spiritual nature of this birth (we are reminded of Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus in 3:1-21).

An explicit reference to the Word’s incarnation is the centre piece of v.14: ‘The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us.’ Not only has John pioneered an explicit identification of the Word with God, but he has also proposed that this same Word has dwelt with us, hypostatically,

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<sup>286</sup> See: H. Freedman (ed) *Midrash Rabbah: Leviticus 31.6*, London, Soncino, 1939, p.401.

<sup>287</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, p.10.



in our very own humanity. The Evangelist upholds that he and his circle had witnessed this event: ‘we have seen his glory.’ The visible Δόξαν of the Logos complements John’s testimony to the incarnation. The Glory of the Lord, in the Old Testament (e.g. *Exd 24:17*), is always indicative of YHWH’s immanent divine presence among his sojourning people; therefore, this glory now belongs to the Word (as God enfleshed) and this is what the disciples have born testimony to. Scholars such as Andreas Köstenberger and Paul Hoskins have also argued that John is emphasising the Word as the fullest expression and completion of the conventions surrounding Jewish temple worship; Jesus is now where the divine glory tabernacles amongst humanity.<sup>288</sup> It is, therefore, the Word, as μονογενής, that is able to reveal the Father’s glory, who is ‘Πλήρης χάριτος καί ἀληθείας.’

After acknowledging John the Baptist’s role in bearing witness to the Word, in v.16, we are told that from the fullness of the Word we have received ‘grace for (ἀντὶ) grace.’ This statement is somewhat problematic. Ἀντὶ usually designates replacement (e.g. ‘instead of’). However, some commentators have preferred to interpret it with its accumulative connotation, thus translating it as ‘grace upon grace.’<sup>289</sup> Although, it must be noted that ἀντὶ does not typically denote accumulation,<sup>290</sup> and the ‘grace for grace’ interpretation makes more sense in light of what follows in v.17. For, if we were to read the preposition as denoting accumulation then we would have to read the Pauline antinomy between Law and grace into John’s statement in v.17 and thus create an oppositional contrast between the two; although typical of Pauline theology, this does not seem to be a convention common to John’s, who generally holds Moses in high regard (e.g. 1:45 and 3:14). However, if we were to accept the initial translation of ‘grace for grace’ then the Law is considered to be an instance of grace (in accordance with Johannean theology) that has been extended to include the ‘supreme example of enduring love shown in Jesus.’<sup>291</sup>

V.18 opens by declaring, in typical Hebraic fashion, that no one has ever seen God. John then inserts quite a dramatic ‘however’ in so far as God is now being revealed. Some textual difficulty does obscure the precise definition of the one doing the revealing: μονογενής θεός is

<sup>288</sup> See: Andreas Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, Michigan, Zondervan, 2009, p.426; Paul Hoskins, *Jesus as the Fulfilment of the Temple in the Gospel of John*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007, p.119.

<sup>289</sup> See: C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to John*, London, Westminster, 1978, p.169; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Trans:George Beasley-Murray), London, Westminster, 1971, p.79.

<sup>290</sup> Joseph Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Massachusetts, Hendrickson, 1999, pp.49-50.

<sup>291</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, p.16.

problematic as it is recorded differently in various Greek manuscripts; sometimes υἱος is introduced after the μονογενής and at other times it is simply μονογενής alone. However, the first reading is well represented in the most reliable manuscripts (Bodmer papyri)<sup>292</sup> and fits more readily into the theological functions of the Word in earlier parts of the Prologue, as we shall see. Thus, it would read ‘God the only Son, being in the bosom of the Father, that one (ἐκεῖνος) discloses him.’ The ‘him’ is inserted, although it is grammatically required<sup>293</sup> and not an intrusion into the text. And the verb ἐξηγέομαι usually means to ‘lead out’<sup>294</sup> however, according to Walter Bauer, it is never understood in this sense in all of the early Christian literature; it is more readily seen as indicating an unfolding or a disclosure.<sup>295</sup> Thus, it is because the Word was God, the same Word who is incarnate in the flesh among us as the unique Son of the Father and expounder of his glory (divine presence), that he is able to disclose the Father who has been seen by no one, except by that one who was with him in the beginning: the Word. Having outlined the theological functions that John ascribes to the *Logos*, we shall now explore the rules of its formation as a concept.

### **The Rules of Formation for the Logos**

In Brown’s excellent appendix on the origins of the Prologue’s use of the ‘Word’, in his *Anchor* commentary on the fourth Gospel, he maintains that there are, fundamentally, *two* prevalent contexts which have been suggested as ‘backgrounds’ to the Johnine Logos. Firstly, there is the strictly Greek background (to be distinguished from Hellenised Judaism); secondly, the Semitic context (both Hellenised and non-Hellenised Judaism). To assess the extent to which John’s Logos Christology is an archaeological shift of the concept of Hebraic wisdom, it will be necessary to critically evaluate the suggested cultural, religious, philosophical and theological contexts for John’s proposal. Beginning then with the Greek context.

Adolf Von Harnack once stated that John’s Prologue evidenced the reality of ‘acute Hellenization.’<sup>296</sup> As far as we can tell, Heraclitus appears to be the first philosopher to introduce the notion of the *Logos* into Greek thought. Diogenes Laertius states that Heraclitus ‘flourished

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid, p.17.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Joseph Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Massachusetts, Hendrickson, 1999, p.223.

<sup>295</sup> See: Walter Bauer, *A Greek – English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago, University of Chicago, 2001, p.275.

<sup>296</sup> Adolf Von Harnack, *Outlines of the History of Dogma* (trans:E.K. Mitchell), Boston, Starr King, 1957, pp.48-60.

around the 69<sup>th</sup> Olympiad [early fifth century B.C.E)]<sup>297</sup> in Ephesus (the traditional site for the composition of John's Gospel). Heraclitus' works are only comprised of fragments collected from various quotes from other ancient sources, these, as well as respective commentaries on his positions by other philosophers, are the sole means we have of ascertaining the content of his philosophy. Sextus Empiricus (*Against the Professors* 7:132-33) claimed to be quoting Heraclitus from a work he produced called '*On Nature*', where he states that 'all things happen according to the Word'; Empiricus further notes that this Word is something akin to a substance which humans partake of in order to act and reflect on what they do.<sup>298</sup> It appears to be a stable and enduring counterpart to his philosophy of change and motion. W.K.C. Guthrie notes that, on occasions, the Word can also be synonymised with the fundamental principle of 'fire' (fire as the source and substance of all reality) in Heraclitian thought. Both seem to point to its function as a common standard by which reality is understood and judged.<sup>299</sup> Fire and the Word are also sometimes described as being eternal; as an everlasting law or rationale to the cosmos.<sup>300</sup> However, there is very little indication that the Word, for Heraclitus, could be considered hypostatically as it is for John, neither is the Word a cosmic substance or world in which all things participate in within Johannine theology. To put it simply, there appears to be no conceptual tie between the two whatsoever; so it would seem that there is some truth in J. Burnet's rather emphatic conclusion that 'the Johannine doctrine of the *λογος* has nothing to do with Heraclitus.'<sup>301</sup>

Stoic philosophy has also been suggested as an informative factor in John's adoption of the Word. Anthony Arthur Long has argued that the Stoics consciously adopted the Heraclitean Logos as an unchanging eternal substance underpinning the flux of finite experience: 'the universe is a world determined by law, by immanent *Logos*.'<sup>302</sup> As a general rule, Stoic philosophy rejected metaphysical universals on the grounds that nothing real could correspond to them; all that is, is in perceived and immediate reality. The Stoic's intention was not to find

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<sup>297</sup> Daniel Graham (ed), *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: The Complete Fragments and Selected Testimonies of the major Presocratics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.139.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid*, p.143.

<sup>299</sup> W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy: The Earlier Presocratics and the Pythagoreans*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1962, p.469.

<sup>300</sup> See: Adam Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers as Theologians: the Divine Arche*, Hampshire, Ashgate, 2007, p.32-33.

<sup>301</sup> Quoted in: Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 1995, p.103.

<sup>302</sup> Anthony Arthur Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics*, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1986, p.144; see also, Marcus Aurelius, *Med* 2:9.

metaphysical explanations for finite reality (as this was already inherent within reality itself) but to describe the world according to its one common, all-pervading principle: its inherent logic, reason; its *Logos*. Long provides an excellent summary of the Stoic's philosophy of nature when stating that it is:

An attempt to provide a rational explanation for all things in terms of the intelligent activity of a single entity which is co-extensive with the universe. The history of the universe is one thing, which can be signified by many different names...uncreated and imperishable nature, God, *Pneuma*, or universal *Logos*.<sup>303</sup>

It does not appear to be necessary to offer a full scale exposition of the intricacies inherent within Stoic philosophy in order to become immediately aware of its distinctions from the *Logos* of the Prologue. John's Word can by no means be characterised by an all-pervading pantheistic principle. For John, the *Logos* comes into the world and is incarnate – hypostatically – in Jesus of Nazareth. Such a suggestion, as encountered by the Stoic, of the possibility of the *Logos* becoming incarnate in one person, rather than infusing all things simultaneously, would appear absurd; even though the *Logos* could be considered to be specifically present within individuals, this would not resemble anything like a unique incarnation. Furthermore, Diogenes Laertius insisted that the *Logos* must not be considered anthropomorphically, let alone hypostatically.<sup>304</sup> For the Stoics, the *Logos* is more of a cosmic principle or force as opposed to a personal enfleshed revelation of God. Therefore, it would appear that, conceptually, there is very little in common between the Word of the fourth Gospel and its manifestation in Stoic thought that would suggest that John has specifically utilised this model to inform his Prologue.

Charles Harold Dodd and, more recently, Craig Evans have argued that the Hermetic literature, especially the *Poimandres*, had a significant influence on the Johannine articulation of the Word.<sup>305</sup> Within the *Poimandres*, the *Logos* is first introduced as one aspect of the creation process outlined in the dialogue itself. We are told that there are two primordial components: light and darkness/watery substance. The water smoked like fire and wailed. From the light a 'holy Word' came upon the watery substance and released the fire that was trapped within it and it leapt to the 'height above' (ἄνω εἰς ὕψος). The fire's upward surge was followed by spirit and

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<sup>303</sup> Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, p.168.

<sup>304</sup> See: Peter Phillips, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel: A Sequential Reading*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, p.96.

<sup>305</sup> See: Charles Harold Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1953, pp.30-6; Craig Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background to John's Prologue*, London, Continuum, 1993, p.72.

air; earth and water were subsequently left behind and mingled together forming the world.<sup>306</sup> Poimandres then announces that he was the primordial light, which is mind and god (τό φῶς ἐκεῖνο, εφη, ἐγὼ Νοῦς ὁ σὸς θεός) and that, out of the light (Mind) the bright Word, who is the son of God, emerges. Furthermore, he states that: that which in us sees and hears is the Word of the lord and that mind is the father God (τό ἐν σοί βλέπον καί ακοῦον, λόγος κυρίου, ὁ δὲ νοῦς πατήρ θεός).<sup>307</sup> At first glance, it would appear quite permissible to acknowledge some significant similarities between the *Poimandres* and the Prologue; however, when assessed carefully, the superficiality of these parallels are quickly exposed. Interestingly, there is the common imagery of *light* and *darkness* and the *Word* coming from the *father* god, as his *son*; both combining together to produce *life*. Nevertheless, in *Poimandres* there is a clear emphasis on the subordination of the *Logos* to the father god, and no identity between the two, as there is for John. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that the *Logos* pre-existed creation as it does for John. It would appear that the *Logos* is brought into being in the creative act itself or is even a product of it. Peter Phillips contends that ‘the intertextual resonance between *Poimandres* and the Prologue is because both works have a common fascination with the Jewish creation story...rather than that they share a belief in the same divine being known as *Logos*.’<sup>308</sup> Given the lack of conceptual similarity between the two texts, it would appear reasonable to affirm Phillips’ conclusion.

Other sources such as ‘pre-Christian Gnosticism’ were once championed amongst certain scholars when discussing the origins of the Prologue and the theological functions of the Word.<sup>309</sup> However, given that Rudolf Bultmann’s thesis of a ‘gnostic redeemer myth’ is generally rejected today (as no significant proof of such a Gnosticism existing has ever been provided) and that the authentic Gnostic - *Nag Hammadi* - texts which do utilise the *Logos* are notably later than John’s Gospel, as well as differing at crucial points where similarity might have been expected,<sup>310</sup> it is sufficient to leave these suggestions to one side. Similarly, the Mandaean liturgies (also suggested by Bultmann as a background to the Prologue) face parallel

<sup>306</sup> *Corpus Hermeticum* 1:4-5, in: Brian Copenhaver (ed), *Hermetica*, Cambridge, Cambridge University, 1995, p.1.

<sup>307</sup> *Corpus Hermeticum* 1:6, p.2.

<sup>308</sup> Peter Phillips, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel: A Sequential Reading*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, p.101.

<sup>309</sup> See, most famously: Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Trans: George Beasley-Murray), London, Westminster, 1971, pp.19-29.

<sup>310</sup> See: Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 1997, p.30.

chronological difficulties as well as conceptual weaknesses in comparisons with John and shall therefore not be pursued any further.<sup>311</sup>

Although Philo of Alexandria is typically categorised under Hellenised Judaism and would thus be expected to feature in the Semitic contexts, it appears more natural here to consider him within our Greek category which he bears closer resemblances to, in this instance, than anything strictly Semitic. Philo's adoption of the Word is another suggested context argued to have influenced John. This thesis has been upheld most famously by Charles Harold Dodd in his classic *'The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel'* (1953) and more recently by Thomas Tobin.<sup>312</sup> As before, given that both John and Philo adopt the term *Logos*, we will need to assess the conceptual similarities to determine whether Dodd's and Tobin's theses are ultimately convincing. As Dodd has highlighted, there are extensive points of stylistic and presentational commonalities to be acknowledged between the respective authors, we shall briefly assess the most prominent parallels.

According to Philo, 'before' the material creation God had intellectual images of the cosmos (just as a King would produce an intellectual plan for the building of a city before it was actually produced) which he then utilised, when fashioning material reality, as an intellectual archetype (νοητόν κόσμον) which he goes on to identify as God's Word (θεοῦ λογόν); which is said to exist in both the mind of God (as archetype) and within the creation itself.<sup>313</sup> Dodd argues that this parallels John's less metaphysically elaborate 'in the beginning was the Word' (John 1:1).<sup>314</sup> However, this 'affinity' seems rather tenuous, as Philo is elaborating a sophisticated metaphysical doctrine of creation through divine ideas or forms which is denoted under the generic title of the Word; where John is clearly not attempting a metaphysics of creation, he is merely stating that the Word was in the beginning; there is nothing to suggest that what John means by 'the Word' is anything conceptually close to Philo's utilisation of the same phrase to articulate Platonic forms.

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<sup>311</sup> See: Craig Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background to John's Prologue*, London, Continuum, 1993, pp.13-14.

<sup>312</sup> See: Thomas Tobin, 'The Prologue of John and Hellenistic Jewish Speculation', in: *CBQ* 52 (1990), pp.252-69.

<sup>313</sup> See: *De Opificio Mundi* 17, 24, in: Jeffrey Henderson (ed), *Philo I (LOEB)*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2004, pp.17,21.

<sup>314</sup> See: Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, p.276.

Philo, when discussing the nature of time, claims that the tangible world is a younger son of God, while the elder son – the intelligible world – ‘remained in his own keeping.’<sup>315</sup> Dodd suggests that this corresponds to John’s affirmation of the Word being with God in the beginning. However, despite some similarity, the context in which Philo proposes this scheme would seem markedly removed from anything that John had in mind.

In *De Somniis I*, Philo claims that the definitive article in front of θεός designates the one true God, while θεός without the article indicates God’s Word e.g. something quasi-divine yet which is not ontologically identical with God himself.<sup>316</sup> Dodd appears to be one of the scholars who argue that John has implemented a similar distinction – as he omitted the article when he designated the Word as God – between God *per se* and G[g]od the Word. However, we have already demonstrated, in our exegesis, that this was unlikely to be the case. Therefore, in light of our previous arguments, Dodd’s comparison does in fact point in the other direction to quite a definitive distinction between the Word in John and Philo.

When Philo is discussing the generation of the universe he states that: ‘ὄργανον δὲ λόγον θεοῦ δι’ οὗ κατεσκευάσθη’<sup>317</sup> which, as Dodd rightly notes, is remarkably close to John’s claim that all things have come into existence through the Word. However, these motifs also occur in the Apocryphal wisdom literature, which many have suggested is a common source for Philo and John, which would account for such similarities without assuming mutual dependence.

John insists that the Word has power to make people ‘sons of God;’ similarly (or at least as Dodd claims), Philo suggests that we may become sons of the Word –if we are not worthy to be sons of the one God.<sup>318</sup> For Philo, becoming a son of the Word is practically a contingency measure, and he does not claim that in being a son of the Word we are endowed with the right to become sons of God (this is precisely why he introduces the Word as an intermediary in the first place). Therefore, it appears that, contrary to Dodd’s suggestion, this – again – points to a notable distinction between Philo and John, rather than a similarity.

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<sup>315</sup> *Quod Deus Immutabilis Sit* 31, in: Jeffrey Henderson (ed) *Philo III (LOEB)*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001, p.27.

<sup>316</sup> *De Somniis I* 229-30, in: Jeffrey Henderson (ed) *Philo V (LOEB)*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001, p.419.

<sup>317</sup> *De Cherubim* 127, in: Jeffrey Henderson (ed) *Philo II (LOEB)*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001, p.82.

<sup>318</sup> See: *De Confusione Linguarum* 145-47, in: Jeffrey Henderson (ed) *Philo IV (LOEB)*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2005, pp.88-91.

Finally, Dodd suggests that John's insistence that no one has seen God (the Father) unless it is through his Word, as the only begotten Son, who resides in his bosom and reveals him, is paralleled in Philo's *De Confusione Linguarum* 97. However, this suggestion is somewhat misleading, as a close look at Philo's proposal reveals a rather different position to that which we find in John. Just as in the 'sons of God' example, Philo is, again, using the Word as an intermediary contingency measure. Firstly, he assumes that one is *able* to see God: 'for it well befits those who have entered into comradeship with knowledge to desire to see the Existent (*the* God) if they *may*.'<sup>319</sup> This is somewhat contradicted by John who explicitly states that 'no one has seen God' (John1:18). Furthermore, Philo claims that if one cannot see God then they should try 'to see at any rate his image, the most holy Word,' which would suggest that it is clearly a compromise formula. He also goes on to claim that if we cannot see his Word then we should comprehend him through the world. For John, no one can see God but the Word, and it is for this reason that the Word is the only means by which one can hope to see God. John's route to God through the Word is no 'back up plan' as it is for Philo, but the only legitimate and possible route open to humanity.

Having assessed some of the major points that Dodd has proposed in order to support his conclusion that 'the substance of a Logos-doctrine similar to that of Philo is present all through the Gospel, and that the use of the actual term *λογος* in the Prologue, in a sense corresponding to that doctrine...falls readily into place,'<sup>320</sup> we have concluded that this is simply not the case. Many of the parallels, when read closely, bore no conceptual resemblance to John's positions and, in fact, suggested the opposite conclusion; that they were markedly distinguishable and even incompatible. It would appear reasonable to suggest that some of the stylistic similarities could be explained if it were shown that both authors were dependent on a shared source, such as the wisdom tradition which we shall explore shortly.

Craig Evans notes that the Jewish liturgical tradition could have influenced the Johannine Prologue.<sup>321</sup> He states that the Targumic (Aramaic translations of scripture) word *memra* (meaning Word) as a specific example. *Memra*, like John's Logos, appears to be something of an intermediary between God and creation. However, many of the positions that are utterly

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<sup>319</sup> *De Confusione Linguarum* 97, in: Jeffrey Henderson (ed) *Philo IV (LOEB)*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2005, pp.62-63.

<sup>320</sup> Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, p.279.

<sup>321</sup> Craig Evans, *Word and Glory: On The Exegetical and Theological Background of John's Prologue*, London, Continuum, 1993, p.120.



regulative to John's articulation of the Word are missing from the Targumic portrayal of *Memra*; specifically, its non-hypostatic nature and its non-identity with God.<sup>322</sup> Some have also suggested that Jewish speculation on the Law may have influenced John's portrayal of the Word within his Prologue.<sup>323</sup> However, as we have already seen, speculation on the Law is inseparable from, and an integral part of, the wisdom tradition and will therefore be considered a part of the concept of Hebraic wisdom.

The clear allusions to Genesis, apparent from the initiation of the Prologue, have led scholars, such as Leon Morris, to claim that its 'atmosphere is unmistakably Hebraic.'<sup>324</sup> If it were part of John's intentions to allude to Genesis, and it would be unreasonable to suggest that it were not, then it is no surprise that we are able to detect strong theological parallels between John's *Logos* and its Hebrew equivalent  $\aleph \aleph \aleph$ ; which is a dynamic 'effective agent for accomplishing the divine will.'<sup>325</sup> God *speaks* the world into being in Genesis; it confronts prophets and administers the divine will (Isa 55:11), and is generally given a dynamic energy of its own accord.<sup>326</sup> It is reasonable to conclude, in the event of John's deliberate allusion to Genesis and some notable conceptual correspondence, that the Hebraic categorisation of the Word has been utilised by John in his expression of the *Logos*. However, as in the case with the Targumic *Memra*,  $\aleph \aleph \aleph$  would not have been considered hypostatically; in order to account for some of the more specific aspects of the *Logos*' theological functions we have to look to another Semitic theme: the Jewish wisdom tradition.

Brown has claimed that 'in the Old Testament presentation of Wisdom, there are good parallels for almost every detail of the Prologue's description of the Word.'<sup>327</sup> Immediately, from the initiation of the Prologue, the *pre-existence* of the Word is affirmed. Similarly, this is also a unique prerogative of Wisdom's being. In *Sira* 24:3, Wisdom announces that: ἐγὼ ἀπὸ στόματος ὑψίστου ἐξῆλθον (perhaps, indicating allusions to a spoken word), he also affirms that Wisdom is from the Lord and has been with him from eternity (*Sir* 1:1); similarly, *Wisdom*

<sup>322</sup> See: John O'Grady, 'The Prologue and Chapter 17 of the Gospel of John', in: Tom Thatcher (ed), *What We Have Heard From the Beginning: The Past, Present and Future of Johannine Studies*, Texas, Baylor University, 2007, pp.215-28, p.221; Martin McNamara, *Targum and New Testament*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2011, p.439.

<sup>323</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, p.523.

<sup>324</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 1995, p.104.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> See: Robert Morgan and John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, pp.159-60; Thorlief Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, London, SCM, 1970, p.64.

<sup>327</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, p.523.

9:10 declares that Wisdom dwells by God's 'throne of glory' in the highest heavens. Both clearly correspond to John's insistence that the Word originates with God in his pre-existence. Although we have determined above that Wisdom must be considered to be divine 'in a sense', however it is quite clear that John goes beyond the conventions outlined in the Hebraic Wisdom tradition in so far as he explicitly identifies God with the Word, which never occurs in that tradition.

*The Word as the instrument of Creation (John 1:3)* is integral to both John and the sapiential tradition respectively. *Wisdom* 8:5-6 claims that Sophia is the τεχνίτις of everything and *Proverbs* 8:30 states that she was an ַןִּלָּהּ in the presence of God.

John's imagery of light and life have strong parallels in the wisdom tradition. *Wisdom* 7:22 affirms that Sophia is an 'effulgence of eternal light' and *Proverbs* 8:35: 'he who finds me finds life.' Although, some have suggested that John's appeal to light and darkness is better explained in relation to their portrayal amongst the Qumran community; although, more recently, many scholars have distanced themselves from this position, instead suggesting that such similarities are far less extensive than first imagined.<sup>328</sup>

Significantly, there is even a linguistic parallel in the μονογενής title attributed to the Word (John 1:14) and Sophia (Wis 7:22) respectively. However, it should be noted that there is a significant conceptual difference between the two; in the case of Sophia it is affirming her uniqueness as opposed to an only begotten Son in the instance of the Word.

Further linguistic commonalities occur in their shared incarnational theme. *Sirach* 24:8 states that ἐν Ἰακωβ κατασκηνοῦσιν, and in *John* 1:14 we have: ἐσκηνοῶσιν ἐν ἡμῖν. For Sirach, Wisdom is embodied in the Law, whereas John is affirming that it is the flesh that receives the divine glory of the Word.

In *Wisdom* 8:21 Sophia is intimately associated with χάρις, although she appears to be given as a gift as opposed to the giver herself, as the Word appears to be in John. She is also portrayed as a 'pure emanation of the glory (δόξης) of the Almighty' (Wis 7:25); she reveals and manifests the glory of God as the Word does in *John* 1:14.

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<sup>328</sup> See, for instance: Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John*, Michigan, Baker, 2007, pp.125-137; George J. Brooke, 'Luke, John, and the Dead Sea Scrolls', in: Mary L. Coloe and Tom Thatcher (eds), *John, Qumran, and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2011, pp.69-93, pp.77-80.

*Sirach 15:7* claims that some were foolish and rejected Wisdom in a similar vein to the Word being rejected by his own *John 1:11*.

Having outlined the parallels between John's *Logos* and the Hebraic Wisdom tradition on a theological, linguistic, and conceptual level, it seems somewhat apparent that the conventions underlying this tradition appear to be an integral part of Johannine Christology to the extent in which it would seem more than permissible to suggest that it is the most persuasive and emphatic of the proposals concerning the background of the Word of the Prologue.

We shall now outline the archaeological correlations and shifts for John's Wisdom Christology noting substantial developments from the Hebraic concept of Wisdom and Pauline Wisdom Christology.

- i) Christ is identified as participating in the divinity of *the God*; although there is hypostatic distinction between the Father and the only Son this does not indicate ontological distinction as the Word is equated with God and he is thus pre-existent.
- ii) Christ is the instrument of Creation; everything is created through him and in him it holds together.
- iii) Christ is equated with eternal life and he has the power to bestow the status of 'children of God' on those who receive him; he gifts us participation in his relationship to the Father. However, a synergy is presupposed between God and creature in order for this to occur; Christ must be received.
- iv) The 'only Son' was tangibly incarnate in the flesh.
- v) Christ acts as revelatory mediator between the Father and creation: No one has seen God, but in seeing the only Son the Father is disclosed because the Son has participated in the life of the Father from the beginning and his existence is communicated through Christ's incarnate existence.

Unlike the positions outlined in the Hebraic wisdom tradition and in Paul, John appears to be the first to fully acknowledge the divinity of Christ/Wisdom as being equal to that of the Father. Although there is still a distinction, this is now purely hypostatic. Christ, therefore, naturally had a share in the divine prerogatives of creation and salvation. John's monotheism appears to be upheld in one sense, in so far as he draws no ontological distinction between the 'only Son' and

the Father (moving beyond Paul), yet he still draws a hypostatic distinction with no metaphysical explanation of how this holds together. His affirmation of Christ's involvement in the divine economy (creation, salvation and the *eschaton*) is in concordance with Paul and the Hebraic Wisdom tradition. So too is the theme of incarnation common to Paul and Jewish Wisdom. However, in John's case the resonance is slightly more potent in so far as his affirmation of the incarnation is taken in coordination with his radical statements about Christ's divinity. John also upholds Christ in his mediatory position of revealing the Father. Although, Christ as mediator of the Father's activity and being is radicalised in so far as the mediation occurs because the mediator is in ontological continuity with the Father; the Son is able to reveal the Father because he is all that the Father is also.

From these observations we are able to note that the rudiments of Hebraic wisdom and Pauline wisdom Christology are included within John's presentation of the Word. However, these regulative points have also been extended to unequivocally identify Christ with God – thus radicalising the nature of the relationship that Christ embodies in this paradox of mediation – but the fundamental points are still quite apparent.

### **The Concept of the Biblical Figure of Wisdom**

In this detailed archaeological investigation into the biblical figure of Wisdom, it has been the aim to be in a position following the analysis to propose a concept of the 'biblical figure of Wisdom' that has grown out of these texts and their accompanying archaeology. The concept presented below is the product of a variety of different factors that have intermingled, including complex theological and philosophical purposes, socio-political and historical climates, and diverse cultural influences and pressures, to present a concept of Wisdom existing within the authoritative enunciative field of the Bible. The reason we have worked extensively with the texts and their history to excavate this concept, is because it is necessary for the critical analysis of later systems of thought that appeal to this tradition to found their own Sophiological proposals, that we have something to measure these claims by and to be in a position to assess the extent to which it is this tradition or indeed a Gnostic one that informs and regulates contemporary Sophiology. Here is the Biblical concept of Wisdom developed through the above analysis.

**i) Biblical Wisdom theology is inherently Christological:**

The figure of Wisdom must be situated within a Christological context in accordance with the figure's identification with Christ. As we have seen, Hebraic Wisdom has been utilised as a conceptual template for exploring Jesus' relationship to the Father and creation in its ontological and economical modes. Within biblical Wisdom theology, ontology is always informed by historical soteriology; it is Wisdom's participation in the divine economy of salvation through Christ (the resurrection – as an eschatological and soteriological act – followed by a reconceived understanding of the nature of Christ's death as sacrificial) that demands Wisdom's ontological identification with the Father (as anticipated by Paul and completed by John). The nature of Wisdom's relationship to the Father, comprised of ontological identification, requires an expansion of Wisdom's economy to include activity that 'predates' the figure's tangible historical presence (e.g. the act of creation) and assimilation into all other divine prerogatives. The incarnation is thus the affirmation of Wisdom's divinity, as well as the necessary ontological presupposition of Wisdom's participation in the divine activity.

**ii) Biblical Wisdom theology functions as a form of *Christological Mediation*:**

Wisdom's mediatory functions, initially revealed in soteriology, although subsequently extended to include every aspect of the divine economy (for instance, creation), are the necessary product of the ontological identification of Wisdom with the Father. Thus, Wisdom's soteriological mediation of divine activity also presupposes ontological mediation in so far as the creation is gifted participation in Christ's relationship with the Father. The incarnation therefore marks an historical *commicatio idiomatum*; Wisdom participates in our humanity and we participate in Wisdom's divinity. Hence, in accordance with Hebraic Wisdom, Wisdom embodies both divinity and humanity; upholding both in harmonious communication. However, this relationship presupposes its foundation in the act of creation itself.

**iv) Biblical Wisdom theology presupposes ecumenical, religious, cultural, socio-political dialogue between various traditions embodied in a shared geography.**

The nature of the relationship existing between Creator and creation from its genesis in Wisdom presupposes that all finite reality (except that which is deemed to be sinful) must be related to

God in some capacity. Thus, biblical wisdom theology is inherently related to and engaged with other cultures and traditions, even if these are then interpreted through a specific cultural gaze.

### **Summative Remarks**

The archaeological analysis above has sought to explore the concept of Hebraic Wisdom and those rules of formation that produced it, before it was adopted and developed by the New Testament writers, noting any archaeological shifts that occurred along the way. It has culminated with the proposed biblical concept of Wisdom that will function as a hermeneutical aid when engaging with later Sophiological discourses that appeal to this tradition as the source and authority from which they write. We shall now explore the archaeology of the Gnostic Sophia, noting its shifts and correlations with this biblical tradition, and whether it can properly be conceived to exist within a different authoritative space, within a properly Gnostic tradition.

## **Chapter II**

### **Towards an Archaeology of the Valentinian Sophia**

In the previous chapter, an archaeological account of the biblical figure of Wisdom was proposed in order to equip the thesis for the critical evaluation of later wisdom theologies that appeal to this same biblical tradition as the source of their authority. It is the current task of this chapter to embark on a similar archaeological analysis of the Wisdom figure as it appears in Valentinian discourses, before critically comparing its positions to those discovered in the biblical tradition outlined in the previous chapter, noting crucial distinctions and any significant continuities. The purpose of this analysis is to provide the thesis with an alternative hermeneutical lens for engaging with later wisdom discourses that may be more closely related to Valentinian thought than indeed traditional biblical wisdom theology. Before discussing the Valentinian Gnostic figure of Wisdom, it is first necessary to provide a preliminary discussion of how the term Gnosticism is understood and utilized within this chapter.

### **What is Gnosticism?**

The study of ‘Gnosticism’ is a notoriously complex field of investigation; for even the most basic of questions - such as: ‘what is it?’ – can be riddled with hermeneutical difficulties. Traditionally, as Hans Jonas informs us, the term itself has functioned as a ‘collective heading for a manifoldness of sectarian doctrines appearing within and around Christianity during its

critical first centuries.<sup>329</sup> The title ‘γνωστικός’ first rose to prominence when Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130-202) adopted it (with the ironic addition of ‘falsely so called’)<sup>330</sup> within his *Adversus Haereses* to categorise various forms of ‘heretical’ theological speculation and religious practice that had proven popular in his time. However, there is evidence to suggest that the title was also claimed by certain ‘sectarian’ groups themselves.<sup>331</sup> Some scholars, following Irenaeus, continue to support the argument that ‘Gnosticism’ can function quite legitimately as a hermeneutical category, on the grounds that there are various premises and positions that are common to the groups that are said to be identifiable within it.<sup>332</sup> However, more recently, other scholars have challenged this contention, arguing instead that it comprises an ‘artificial scholarly invention’ which is ultimately vacuous (something akin to the colonial invention of the term ‘Hinduism’),<sup>333</sup> while others, yet still, propose something of a *via media* between this dichotomy.<sup>334</sup> Although it is important to acknowledge – as with all ‘unities of discourse’ - that there are, undoubtedly, certain inadequacies and shortcomings surrounding the broadness of the genus ‘Gnosticism,’ there are, however, such a specific set of occurrences of a variety of particular underlying themes - which appear to be unique when considered against the background of other ancient Hellenistic and Oriental traditions (e.g. the rejection of the creator God for a higher divine transcendent reality)<sup>335</sup> - which would seem to permit, perhaps even require, a cautious application of the term to certain systems of thought.

Although some have queried the appropriateness of applying this categorisation of Gnosticism to Valentinism itself,<sup>336</sup> it still appears to function quite legitimately as a descriptive tool,

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<sup>329</sup> Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1963, p.32.

<sup>330</sup> See: Irenaeus, ‘*Adversus Haereses* II: I’ (from henceforth this shall be abbreviated to *AH*).

<sup>331</sup> See: M.L. Peel, ‘Gnostic Eschatology and the New Testament,’ in: *Nov T 12 (1970)*, pp.141-165; Alastair Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy: A Study in the History of Gnosticism*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 2004, p.6.

<sup>332</sup> See, for instance: Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, Giovanni Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1990; and, Simone Pétrement, *A Separate God: The Origins and Teachings of Gnosticism*, New York, Harper, 1990; and, Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp.122-27.

<sup>333</sup> See: Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?*, Massachusetts, Harvard, 2003, p.6; Michael Allen Williams, *Re-Thinking “Gnosticism”: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*, New Jersey, Princeton, 1996; Arthur Versluis discusses Gnosticism, as a category, in light of power analysis: Arthur Versluis, *The New Inquisitions: Heretic-Hunting and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Totalitarianism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp.69-85.

<sup>334</sup> See, for instance: David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity*, Massachusetts, Harvard, 2010, p.5.

<sup>335</sup> For an analysis of other common themes see: Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1963, pp.42-47.

<sup>336</sup> See, for instance, Christoph Marksches, *Valentinus Gnosticus? Untersuchungen zur valentinianischen Gnosis: mit einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten Valentins*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1992.



especially when taking into consideration the speculative similarities that it shares with other traditions which have typically been described as being Gnostic.<sup>337</sup>

Valentinus himself (the founder of the ‘school’) was reportedly born in Egypt and educated in Alexandria; but later teaching in Rome roughly between 135 and 160 A.D.<sup>338</sup> It has been recorded that Valentinus had a variety of followers who also went on to establish ‘schools’ of their own; the most significant of those would include: Heracleon (c. late second century), Theodotus (c. second century), Ptolemaeus (c. second century), and Marcus ‘the magician’ (c. second century). While some Valentinian groups broke away from the Church to start their own unique and specialised communities with various idiosyncratic practices (Irenaeus has much to say about their ‘decadent’ rituals),<sup>339</sup> others seemed to have remained within the Church, even fashioning successful careers for themselves; climbing the ecclesiastical ranks at Rome, for instance.<sup>340</sup>

This diversity that existed on the surface of the various Valentinian traditions appears to have been a distinguishing feature of the tradition itself; innovating new myths and philosophies even became an integral part of their corporate life; even when their various formulations would often jeopardise the coherency of their other proposals. However, despite this complicated multiplicity, there is usually agreement concerning the most fundamental aspects of the Valentinian narrative, which in turn legitimises the working category of ‘Valentinism.’<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> See, particularly the ‘Sethian’ influenced texts: *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II:V, XII:II) and *The Hypostasis of the Archons* (NHC II:IV).

<sup>338</sup> Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, p.178.

<sup>339</sup> See: *AH, I, XIII:IV*

<sup>340</sup> Florinus for example. See: Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus* (trans: Michael Steinhauser), Minneapolis, Fortress, 2003, p.313.

<sup>341</sup> The origins of the speculative ideas and myths commonly characterised as Valentinian are hotly debated. Some have argued that they have been sourced from ancient Egyptian, Persian, Syrian, or Mesopotamian religion; see, for instance: C.J. Bleeker, ‘The Egyptian Background of Gnosticism,’ in: *Colloquio di Messina (13-18 April 1966), Le Origini Dello Gnosticismo*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1977, pp.229-238; L. Kakosy, ‘*Gnosis und ägyptische Religion*,’ in: *ibid*, pp.238-251; K. Rudolph, ‘*Zum Problem: Mesopotamien und Gnostizismus*,’ in: *ibid*, pp.302-307; Gerard van Groningen, *First Century Gnosticism*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1967, pp.9-15; Alastair Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1996, chap II; K. Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1983, pp.275-294. While others have suggested that there is a common Greco-Roman origin to be identified; see: B.A. Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature*, Minneapolis, Fortress, 2007; Wilhelm Bousset, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis*, Göttingen, Hubert, 1973. But, more recently, many have argued that their roots are more readily explained by appealing to Jewish or Christian sources; see, especially: Pheme Perkins, *Gnosticism and the New Testament*, Minneapolis, Fortress, 1993, pp.20-29; Carl B. Smith, *No Longer the Jews: The Search for Gnostic Origins*, Massachusetts, Henrickson, 2004; Alastair Logan, *The Gnostics: Identifying an Early Christian Cult*, New York, Continuum, 2006; Simone Pétrement, *A Separate God: The Origins*

Until the monumental discovery, made last century, of the ancient texts comprising the *Nag Hammadi library*,<sup>342</sup> every account of Valentinian theology and tradition had been obtained solely from the polemic of the Church Fathers. The earliest known work of this kind was the *Syntagma* of Justin Martyr (c.165); however, the contents of which have now been lost and attempts to reconstruct them have been all but abandoned.<sup>343</sup> In the absence of this work, Irenaeus of Lyons' prodigious *Adversus Haereses* (c.140-200) remains the most detailed and significant source of information on Valentinian speculation. It consists of five books (originally composed in Greek, but the Latin translation is the only complete version that remains) the first of which is the most important; offering a comprehensive account of Valentinism. Irenaeus composed his *magnum opus* after a friend, desiring to learn more about this new 'religion,' requested his thoughts on the new school. Irenaeus responded with a detailed exposition of the various strands of Valentinian philosophy with the ultimate intention of refuting their positions. He reports that he is as competent as any in carrying out this task given the fact that he had first-hand knowledge of Valentinus' schools and was even familiar with their theological writings.<sup>344</sup>

Hippolytus of Rome's *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium (Philosophoumena)* (c. post 222) is perhaps the second most important of the herisological reports. His monumental work (originally composed in Greek) attempted to trace all heretical thought back to pagan philosophy. Although his authorship has been questioned,<sup>345</sup> the importance of the work is measured by its preservation of original Valentinian fragments. Furthermore, despite knowing Irenaeus' account, he does not appear to use it as his primary source for describing Valentinism, thus he provides us with his own independent description which can be utilised to compare with the one that Irenaeus supplies.<sup>346</sup> Similarly, Clement's *Excerpts of Theodotus* (chapters XLII – LXV c. 140-215) have preserved some valuable original material.

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and *Teachings of Gnosticism*, New York, Harper, 1990, and: Attilio Mastrocinque, *From Jewish Magic to Gnosticism*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2005.

<sup>342</sup> For a detailed account of the nature of this discovery see: Marvin Meyer, *The Gnostic Discoveries*, New York, Harper, 2005, pp.13-33.

<sup>343</sup> Justin mentions the work himself in *I Apol VI*; an attempt to reconstruct the work was made by Pierre Prigent; see: Pierre Prigent, *Justin et l'Ancien Testament*, Paris, Librairie Lecoffre, 1964.

<sup>344</sup> Giovanni Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1990, p.3.

<sup>345</sup> See: P. Nautin, *Hippolyte et Josipe*, Paris, 1947.

<sup>346</sup> Ismo Dunderberg claims that Hippolytus drew on 'another source of information, usually designated as "System/Version B"' (Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus*, New York, Columbia, 2008, p.9. However, there is evidence to suggest that Irenaeus was also familiar with System/Version B.

Further herisological reports on Valentinism can be sourced from Tertullian (c. 150-225). However, whilst we know that he would have been familiar with some important primary materials (e.g. Alexander's collection of Valentinus' Psalms), he chose – in the words of Ismo Dunderberg – to 'slavishly follow Irenaeus in writing his treatise *Against Valentinians*.'<sup>347</sup> This has resulted in him leaving very little in the way of original sources that we can draw from. However, fortunately this is not the case with Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 315); who, in his *Panarion*, despite also being greatly indebted to Irenaeus, gives us access to two primary sources, which he quotes at length: Ptolemaeus' *Letter to Flora* and the *Letter of Instruction*. Similarly, Origen of Alexandria (c.184-254) preserved some fragments of Heracleon's commentaries on the Gospels in his own *Commentary on John*.

However, in the advent of the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices, we now have access to a range of material that is considered original to various Valentinian authors. Perhaps, the three most significant works for the purposes at hand– in so far as they give us an authentic mode of measuring the accuracy of the various systems reported by Irenaeus and others – are *The Gospel of Truth* (NHC I: III; XII: II),<sup>348</sup> *The Tripartite Tractate* (NHC I:V),<sup>349</sup> and *A Valentinian Exposition* (NHC XI:II).<sup>350</sup> In light of these texts, some have questioned the accuracy of the herisological accounts.<sup>351</sup> However, in other cases to the contrary, they have been used to confirm, by scholars such as Niclas Förster and Francois Sagnard,<sup>352</sup> what Giovanni Filoramo has called, 'the substantial reliability of Irenaeus.'<sup>353</sup> In agreement with these scholars, it would appear fair to support the conclusion that the descriptive accounts that Irenaeus provides of the Valentinian traditions seem, on large, to correspond, fairly substantially, with the positions that we encounter in the Valentinian texts of the Nag Hammadi library. Although the genealogical trees established by the Church Fathers, within their respective assessments, are clearly proposed

<sup>347</sup> Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, p.10.

<sup>348</sup> NHC is an abbreviation of Nag Hammadi codices. *The Gospel of Truth* shall be abbreviated to *GT*.

<sup>349</sup> From henceforth, to be referred to as *TT*.

<sup>350</sup> To be abbreviated to *VE*. Other texts considered to be Valentinian include: *The Treatise on the Resurrection* (NHC I:IV), *The Gospel of Phillip* (NHC II:III), *The First Apocalypse of James* (NHC V:III), and *The Interpretation of Knowledge* (NHC XI:I).

<sup>351</sup> For instance, Thomas Ferguson states that: 'Irenaeus is no longer considered an inept editor of other people's work' (Thomas Ferguson, 'The Rule of Truth and Irenaeus Rehectic in Book 1 of *Against Heresies*,' in: *Vigiliae Christianae* 55:4 (2001), pp.356-375, p.375).

<sup>352</sup> See, for instance: Niclas Förster, *Marcus Magus: Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe, Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Göttingen, Georg-August-Universität, 1997; Francois Sagnard, *La Gnose Valentinienne et le Tèmoignage de Saint Irenee*, Paris, Vrin, 1947.

<sup>353</sup> Giovanni Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1990, p.4.

in order to discredit the belief systems which they were describing, and are rightly categorised as ‘arbitrary ideological constructions’,<sup>354</sup> there is no evidence, from the Nag Hammadi texts at least, that would suggest that this bias has distorted, in any significant way, the accounts of the systems themselves. Therefore, in light of this conclusion, the *Adversus Haereses* shall function as our principle source for accounting for Valentinism; a source that shall be examined and tested against the other herisological reports as well as the relevant texts from the Nag Hammadi codices.

Therefore, we shall now attempt to provide an archaeological account of Valentinian wisdom theology which will equip us for the investigations of later systems of thought that shall follow in the thesis.

The principle task of this chapter is not to address the wider issues concerning the study of Gnosticism (the debates surrounding origins, histories, and the mutual relationships between the various Gnostic systems), but much more specifically, to assess the theological, philosophical, and mythological functions that Sophia performs within the rudimentary Valentinian narrative and how these emerge within this particular discourse. Thus, the archaeology must not only account for the concept within an authoritative enunciative field (Valentinian Gnosticism), but its rules of formation, how this particular concept, under this particular authority, emerges and what causes this to be the case. Let us first look at the narrative itself, following its development and portrayal.

### **Sophia as Announced within the Gnostic Narrative**

Irenaeus opens his account of the Valentinian cosmological drama by asserting that ‘they maintain that in the invisible heights there exists a certain perfect, pre-existent *aeon*’<sup>355</sup> who is called *Proarche* (Προαρχήν), *Propator* (Προπάτορα), or *Bythus* (Βυθόν), and whose nature is comprised of radical transcendence and incomprehensibility. Hippolytus states that this ‘originating cause of the universe is a Monad, unbegotten, imperishable, incomprehensible,

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> *AH I.I.I.* Aeon (αἰών) appears to have been produced from the words αἰεὶ ὢν (ever-being) which in its Valentinian context means something along the lines of ‘an emanation from the divine substance, subsisting coordinately and co-eternally with the deity, the Pleroma still remaining one’ (Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Arthur Cleveland (eds), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers I*, New York, Cosimo, 2007, p.316).

inconceivable, productive, and a cause of the generation of all existent things.’<sup>356</sup> Typically, *Bythus* is characterised by masculinity contrary to his female counterpart *Ennoia* (Ἐννοίαν), *Charis* (Χάριν) or, *Sige* (Σιγήν) who exists alongside him. Together they are said to initiate the creative process through sexual conjunction.<sup>357</sup> However, there appears to have been much dispute over the nature of this initial process of begetting. Some of the Valentinians rejected this primary *duality*, opting instead for *Bythus*’ original sole self-dependency in the creative act; both scenarios are reported, although there seems to be greater support for the latter option, of at least, the *primacy* of *Bythus*.<sup>358</sup> Irenaeus then reports that *Bythus* had determined to inaugurate the creative process by depositing his seed (containing the origins of all being) into *Ennoia* who subsequently became impregnated and birthed *Nous* (Νοῦν), *Monogenes* (Μονογενῆ) *Father* (Πατέρα), or *Beginning of all beings* (Ἀρχὴν τῶν πάντων) as well as his female consort *Aletheia* (Ἀλήθεια).<sup>359</sup> *Nous* is claimed to be ‘similar and equal to him who had produced him, and was alone capable of comprehending his Father’s greatness.’<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>356</sup>Hippolytus, ‘Refutation of All Heresies VI:XXIV,’ in: Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers VI:I*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1990, p.225 (from henceforth to be abbreviated to *RH*). Hippolytus’ reports are supported by three prominent Valentinian texts: *GT XVII:X* claims that the Father is ‘incomprehensible’ and ‘superior to every thought’; similarly, *TT LI:X* claims that the Father is a ‘single One,’ and *VE XXII: XXV* affirms that the Father is an ‘ineffable One’ (see: James Robinson (ed), *The Nag Hammadi Library*, New York, Harper, 1990, p.40, p.60, p.482).

<sup>357</sup> *AH I:I:I*

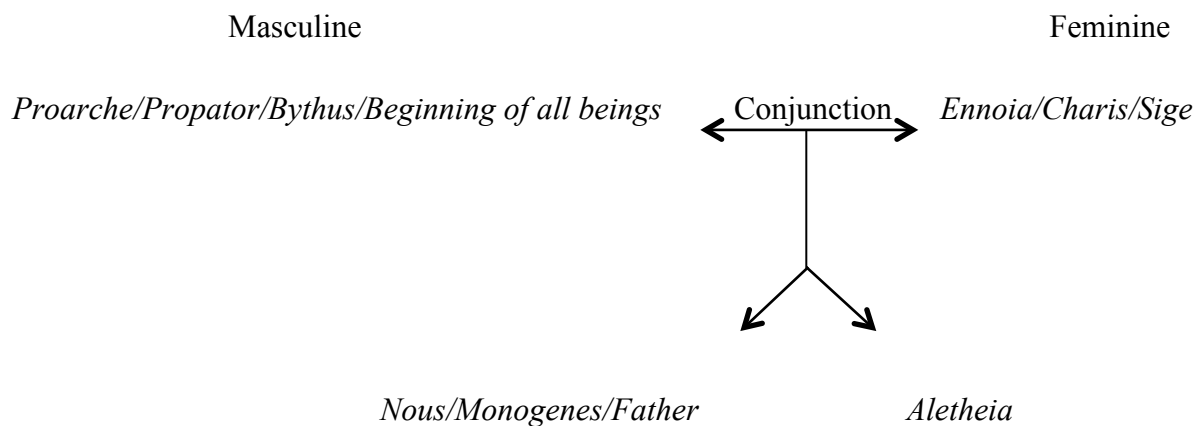
<sup>358</sup> See, for instance: *RH VI:XXIV*, p.225; Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion I:II*, in: Frank Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis Book 1 (Sects 1-46)*, Leiden, Hotei Publishing, 2009, p.170; *GT XVIII: V*, p.40; *TT LI: X*, p.60; *VE XXII:V*, p.282.

<sup>359</sup> Epiphanius of Salamis reports a different account to Irenaeus and gives greater precedence to the role that *Ennoia* plays in sexually seducing *Bythus* and exciting his desire for her. He states that: ‘wishing to break eternal bonds, the imperishable [*Ennoia*]...softened the majesty to a desire for his repose. And by coupling with him she showed forth the *Father*’ (Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion I:II*, in: Frank Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis Book 1 (Sects 1-46)*, Leiden, Hotei Publishing, 2009, p.170). The *TT (LIII:XXXV*, p.61) is closer to Irenaeus’ account in so far that it refuses to acknowledge any ‘co-worker’ with *Bythus*.

<sup>360</sup> *AH I:I:I*

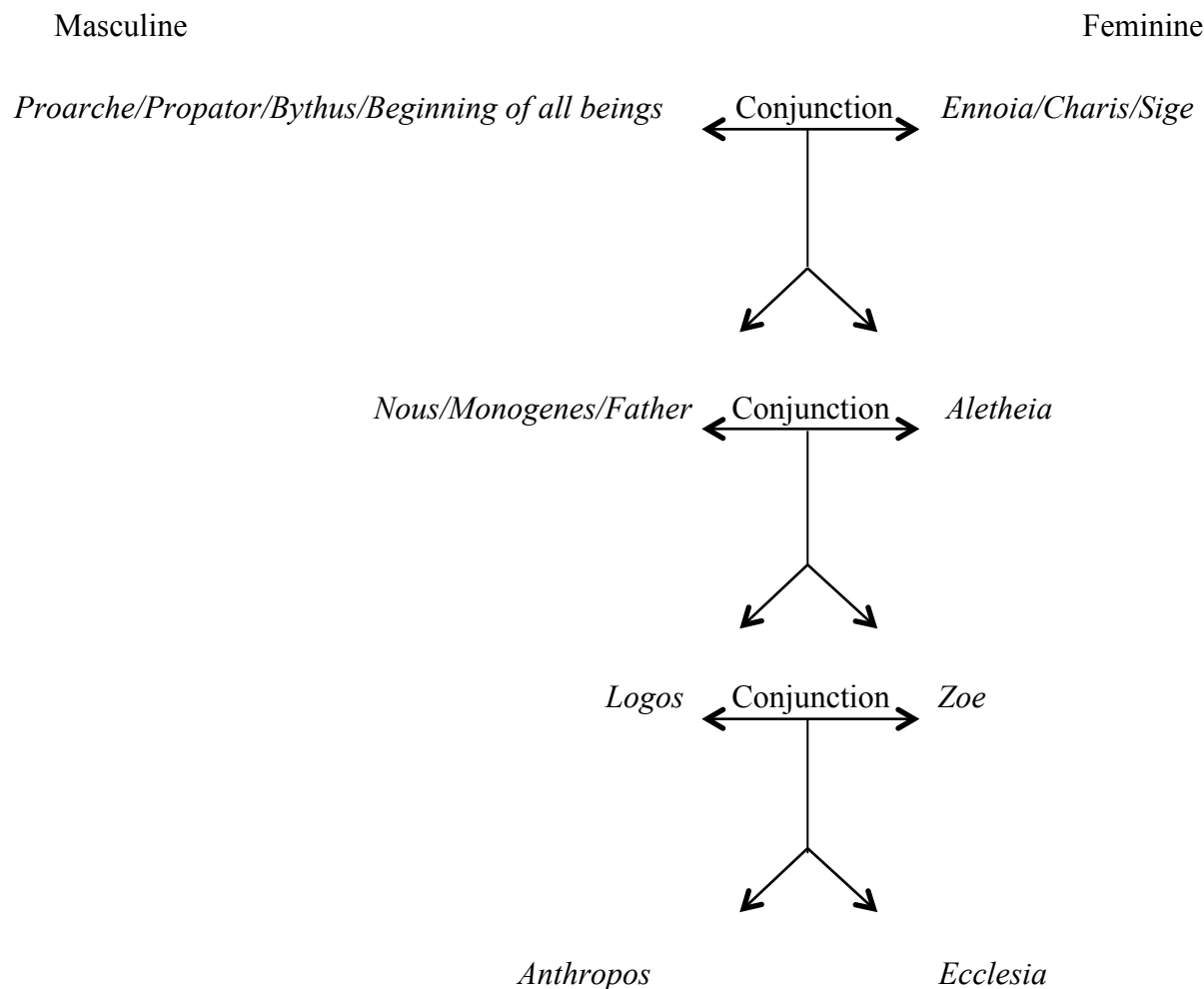
These initial two dyads comprise the first tetrad:

Figure 1.



Then *Nous*, having realised the purpose of his existence (to begin to fashion the entire Pleroma), conjoined with *Aletheia* who gave birth to the dyad of *Logos* (Λόγον) and *Zoe* (Ζωήν); both of whom then further consorted to produce *Anthropos* (Ἀνθρωπον) and *Ecclesia* (Εκκλησίαν); giving us the first begotten primary Ogdoad:

Figure 2.

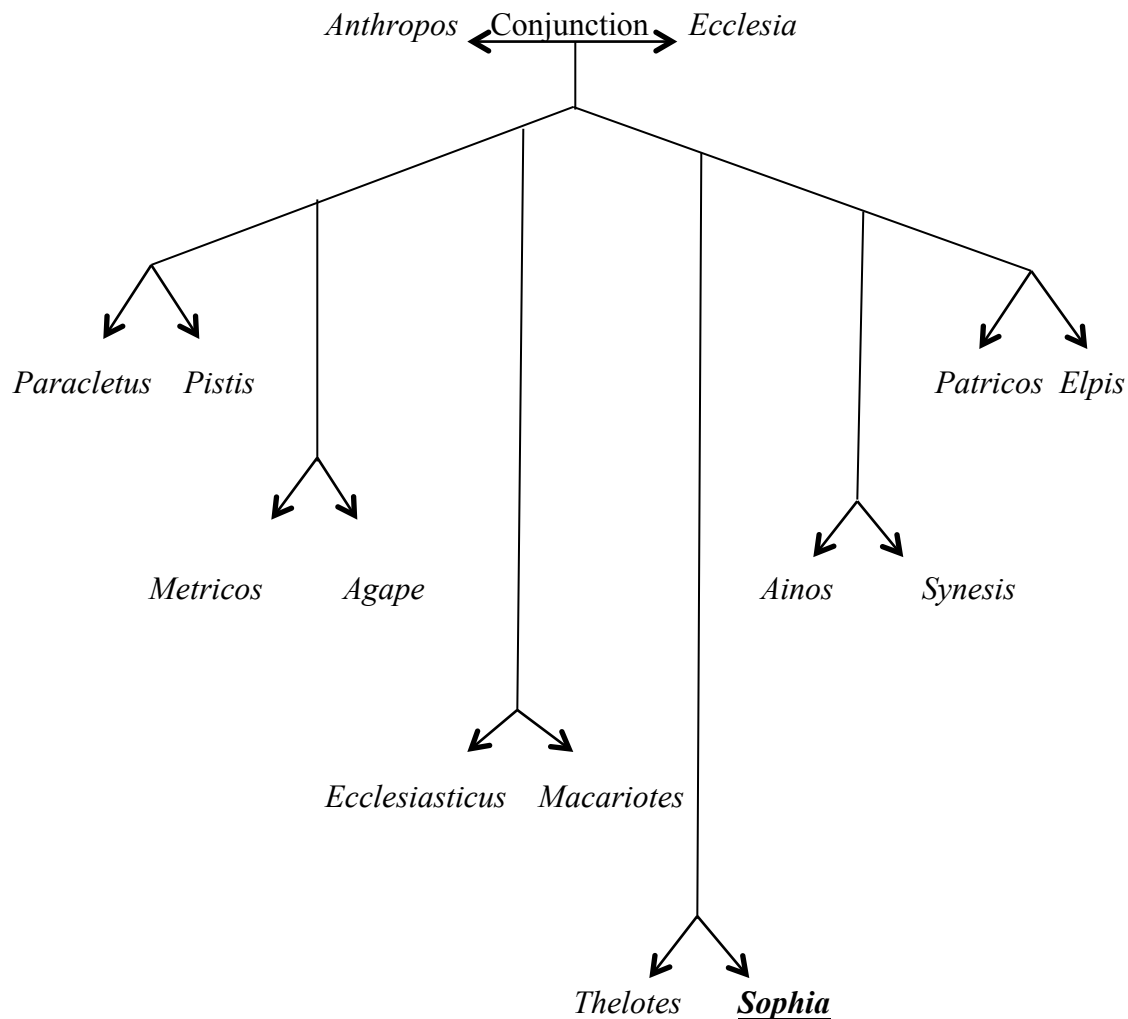


Then, in an effort to glorify the Father, *Logos* and *Zoe* produced a further ten *aeons*; giving us eighteen in total.<sup>361</sup> However, the crux of the Valentinian drama, namely Sophia's personal biography, does not occur on this side of the genealogy, which plays no specific role in the rest

<sup>361</sup> For the sake of completion, the ten *aeons* that Irenaeus names are: *Bythius* (Βύθιος) and *Mixis* (Μίξις), *Ageratos* (Αγήρατος) and *Henosis* (Ἑνώσις), *Autophyes* (Αὐτοφυής) and *Hedone* (Ἡδονή), *Acinetos* (Αχίνητος) and *Syncrasis* (Σύγκρασις), and *Monogenes* (Μονογενής) and *Macaria* (Μαχαρία) (*AH I:1*). Hippolytus reports the same account (*RH IV:XXV*). Although, Epiphanius offers a different genealogy; see: Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion I:II*, in: Frank Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis Book I (Sects 1-46)*, Leiden, Hotei Publishing, 2009, p.171.

of the myth; therefore, we shall move on directly to the progenitive activity of *Anthropos* and *Ecclesia*. It is claimed that *Anthropos* and *Ecclesia* produced a further twelve *aeons*:<sup>362</sup>

Figure 3.



With this diagram, we have now accounted for the standard thirty *aeons* of the Valentinian Pleroma.<sup>363</sup> Amongst all of them, *Nous* held precedence in so far as he was the only *aeon* that

<sup>362</sup> Again this genealogy is supported by Hippolytus *RH VI:XXV*. The order of the *aeons*: 'Παράκλητος καὶ Πίστις, Πατριχὸς καὶ Ἐλπίς, Μητριχὸς καὶ Ἀγάπη, Αἰνὸς καὶ Σύνεσις, Ἐκκλησιαστικὸς καὶ Μαχαριότης, Θελητὸς καὶ Σοφία.'



was capable of contemplating *Bythus*; to all the others he was said to be incomprehensible and invisible.<sup>364</sup>

It is noted that *Nous* desired to mediate his knowledge of *Bythus* to the other *aeons*, and would have done so if it were not for *Ennoia/Sige* who restrained him in accordance with the will of *Bythus*. However, this would appear to have been in vain as, although all of the *aeons* secretly longed to contemplate their originator, *Sophia*, the youngest *aeon*, ‘suffered passion apart from the embrace of her consort *Theletes*’<sup>365</sup> and sought to contemplate the primary transcendent cause. This passion supposedly commenced in all of the *aeons* connected to *Nous* and *Aletheia* and infectiously spread to the base of the Pleroma until it manifested itself in *Sophia*. Although it was under the pretence of affection, *Sophia* was overwhelmed with her desire for *Bythus* and recklessly sought to contemplate him after the manner of *Nous*.<sup>366</sup> What she attempted was impossible and her failure caused her an ‘extreme agony of mind;’ but her desire was insatiable and she continued to explore the depths of the originator, and would have been absorbed into *Bythus* at the expense of her own existence if it were not for *Horos*<sup>367</sup> (to be discussed below) who brings her back to her proper place within the Pleroma, where she is subsequently convinced of the incomprehensibility of the originator and then sets aside her initial passion, having realised its impossibility.<sup>368</sup>

Almost immediately we are able to note some drastic discrepancies between the biblical concept of Wisdom and the Valentinian presentation that we have here. Firstly, within the

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<sup>363</sup> Although they vary significantly, *Bythus* is sometimes excluded from the number. However, in the *VE XXX:XX*, p.484 there is some evidence to suggest a similar genealogical construction centered on a primary triacontad. There is also clear evidence in this same text which demonstrates that Valentinians took numerology very seriously; counting further emanations to take the *aeons* up to three hundred and sixty so as to reflect the number of days in a year. Irenaeus reports there being a similar significance attributed to the number thirty; which is linked with the proposed life span of Jesus (*AH I,I:III*).

<sup>364</sup> See: *GT XXII:XXVII*, p.43.

<sup>365</sup> *AH I II:II*.

<sup>366</sup> *TT LXXV:XV*, p.72.

<sup>367</sup> *Horos* is the power of *Bythus*. It does not appear to be a self-subsisting *aeon* at this point, but a designated limit that marks out a boundary to the other *aeons* to protect them from being absorbed into the total unity of *Bythus*. However, later it is suggested that *Bythus* produces *Horos* without conjunction in response to *Sophia*’s disobedience. Jonas suggests that they were probably two different figures that were later conflated in to one (Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1963, p.184).

<sup>368</sup> Whilst the *Excerpts of Theodotus XXXI:III* report a similar account to that given by Irenaeus, Hippolytus claims that *Sophia* wanted to imitate the originator’s productivity by begetting without conjunction and was ignorant of her inability to do so (see: *RH VI:XXV*). The *TT LXXVII-LXXX*, p.73-74, acknowledges a similar basic narrative although it is less elaborate and the *Logos* has the role of *Sophia*. However, the *VE* supports Irenaeus’ outline, with *Sophia* playing the same basic role in the narrative.

biblical account, wisdom theology was utilized to make theological and philosophical sense of a concrete event or encounter with God, be it through the Mosaic Law, or for the early Christians, Jesus of Nazareth. Even in *Proverbs 8* Wisdom's theological role is to make sense of God's presence in the world and poetically and imaginatively convey this encounter of the Jewish people. However, within this narrative, we find ourselves within the realms of a mythological metaphysics. Wisdom is portrayed here as an individualised deity, playing a dramatic role within a larger myth of agonistic interchanges between a series of gods, that have produced themselves through sexual conjunction.

The 'events' that this narrative has portrayed so far have occurred entirely within the Pleroma itself. However, the resulting passions will inaugurate a series of events that will produce a reality outside of this initial totality.

### **The Fall of Sophia**

Both Irenaeus and Hippolytus report that *Sophia's* passion brought forth some sort of 'amorphous substance.'<sup>369</sup> They suggest that the formlessness of the substance produced by *Sophia* was a result of her passion being 'unfertilised' by her male counterpart. Within Valentinian speculation, although perhaps under the influence of Platonic cosmology,<sup>370</sup> the masculine *aeons* provide form and content to the mass which is produced by the purely receptive female aeons.

*Sophia*, having beheld the outcome of her passion, began 'weeping and bewailing' in despair and in fear that she may lose her own existence on account of her unwanted production. In her distress she turned, in supplication, to *Bythus* while the other *aeons* also interceded for her. Irenaeus then claims that 'the Father [*Bythus*] afterwards produced, in his own image, by means of *Monogenes* [*Nous*]...*Horos* [*Ὅρον*] without conjunction.'<sup>371</sup> *Horos* is also termed *Stauros* (*Σταυρόν*), *Lytrotes* (*Λυτρωτήν*), *Carpistes* (*Καρπιστήν*), *Horothetes* (*Ὁροθέτην*) or, *Metagoges* (*Μεταγωγέα*). The primary function of *Horos*, in this instance, is to expel the amorphous

<sup>369</sup> See: *AH I, II:III; RH VI:XXVI*; and the *TT* reports a very similar occurrence: 'things which came into being from the arrogant thought...[which are] copies, shadows and phantasms lacking' (*TT LXXVIII:XXX*, p.74).

<sup>370</sup> See, for instance, Plato's third ontological category in the *Timaeus* the passive 'wherein,' in which something becomes, he likens to the female recipient of masculine form (Plato, *Timaeus* (LOEB), Cambridge, Harvard, 1929, p.118).

<sup>371</sup> *AH I, II:IV*, p.318. Hippolytus does not reproduce this account and misses out the production of *Horos* entirely.

substance from *Sophia*.<sup>372</sup> The formless substance is taken away from her, along with the passions that occasioned its appearance, and she is restored in to the harmony of the Pleroma after the separation has occurred. Her illegitimate child is something of an ontological mutation; for we are told that it has inherited some of the spiritual qualities of its mother, yet it is still formless.<sup>373</sup>

It is then claimed that *Nous* produced (Hippolytus reports that this was in conjunction with *Aletheia*) a further conjugal dyad: *Christ* (Χριστόν)<sup>374</sup> and the *Holy Spirit* (Πνεῦμα ἅγιον) with the view to ‘fortifying and strengthening the Pleroma.’<sup>375</sup> The specific role of *Christ* is to teach the other *aeons* of their inability to fully comprehend the depths of their fashioner and to be content with the knowledge of him that *Nous* mediates to them. The *Holy Spirit* is then said to have revealed the equality of the *aeons* to each respectively, whereby a peaceful and contented rest ensued within the Pleroma. Thenceforward, collectively praising *Bythus* in response to this re-established harmony, they each brought forth a gift to reflect the highest quality of their natures, and joining them together, they produced ‘a being of most perfect beauty, the very star of the Pleroma, the perfect fruit, namely *Jesus*,’ who is also called *Saviour*, *Christ*, *Paraclete*, and *Logos*.<sup>376</sup> His generation was also accompanied by an angelic host that were to act as his guardians.

However, *Sophia*’s amorphous substance, which is referred to as *Achamoth* (Ἀχαμώθ),<sup>377</sup> began to become ‘violently excited in those places of darkness and vacuity.’<sup>378</sup> *Christ* (not Jesus the ‘fruit of the Pleroma’) moved by compassion, descended beyond the boundary marked by *Horos* and imparted form to her and withdrew back again.<sup>379</sup> From *Christ*’s descent she had become aware of her Pleromic origins and desired to return ‘home’ but was denied by *Horos* at

<sup>372</sup> Hippolytus has this role performed by *Christ* and the *Holy Spirit*.

<sup>373</sup> On this mutated mediatory nature of ‘fallen *Sophia*’ and its relationship to similar narratives see: M. Tardieu, *Trois Mythes Gnostiques*, Paris, *Études augustiniennes*, 1974, p.57; Otfried Hofius, *Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes*, Tübingen, Siebeck, 1972, pp.28-48; G.C. Stead, ‘The Valentinian Myth of Sophia’, *JTS* 20 (1969), pp.75-104.

<sup>374</sup> This *aeon* should not be confused with Jesus of Nazareth; he has yet to feature in the myth.

<sup>375</sup> *AHI*, II:V, p.318.

<sup>376</sup> *AHI*, II:VI, P.318. Hippolytus reports a near identical account (*RH* VI:XXVII, p.231); both are somewhat confirmed by *TT* LXXXV:XXV.

<sup>377</sup> Thought to be a play on the Hebrew word for Wisdom: חֵכֶם; on the etymology of this name see: Carsten Colpe, ‘*Gnosis I*’, *RGG* II, pp.1648-1642.

<sup>378</sup> *AHI*, IV:I, p.320.

<sup>379</sup> A parallel account of this descent (albeit in a much vaguer form) can be identified in the *VE* XXXII, P.485.

the boundary which he had marked out. Having had her desire thwarted, she falls into three primary passions: *grief* (λύπην), *fear* (φόβον), and *perplexity* (ἀπορίαν) – all of which are related to the cardinal Valentinian sin: *ignorance* (ἀγνοία).<sup>380</sup> The final passion is said to be her desire, excited by *Christ*, to return back to the Pleroma. Both Irenaeus and Hippolytus report that these primary passions are the substances from which finite reality (in all its dimensions) were formed. Thus, from her desire to repent and return to the Pleroma the relatively positive aspects of life ‘outside’ of the Pleroma were formed namely, *souls* and the *Demiurge* (Δημιουργόν). From her negative passions came material substances in all their varieties.<sup>381</sup>

Once *Achamoth* had passed through this variety of passions, she appealed to *Christ* to return to her once again. However, not wanting to descend outside of the Pleroma for a second time, he sent the *Paraclete* (*Jesus* ‘the fruit of the Pleroma’) with his army of bodyguards, his angels, to aid *Achamoth*. It is said that he imparted further form to her (intelligent form) and ostracised her passions from her and condensed them (rather than destroying them<sup>382</sup>) into ‘unorganised matter’ to which he imparted ‘corporeal structures’ which were of a twofold nature: evil (born out of her ‘negative passions’) and a lesser evil (resulting from her repentance and desire for the Pleroma).<sup>383</sup>

Having been set free from her passions she then gazed upon *Jesus* and, being moved into an ecstasy, spontaneously produced further beings after her own image and after the images of *Jesus*’ angels. This threefold division provides the basic Valentinian ontology, which is comprised of the three forms: matter (from the negative passions),<sup>384</sup> animal (from her repentance and longing to return to the Pleroma), and spiritual (which was brought forth in her ecstasy). Being unable to give form to the spiritual mode of being, she turned her attention to the animal substance producing the ‘creator’ of this world: ‘*Father* (Πατέρα), *Metropator* (Μητροπάτορα), *Apator* (Απάτορα), or *Demiurge*. He is said to be ruler of all the things which

<sup>380</sup> Where the fall of *Sophia* that occurred within the Pleroma was the product of unsuitable desire in ignorance; *Achamoth* is said to be opposed to the very notion of knowledge.

<sup>381</sup> Accounts of which substances came from which passions vary greatly, it does not appear essential to the overall narrative to relate them here in their entirety; if one wants a fuller overview see: *AH I, IV:II-V; RH VI:XXVII*; Francois Sagnard, *La Gnose Valentinienne et le Témoinage de Saint Irenee*, Paris, Vrin, 1947.

<sup>382</sup> Apparently, the passions have taken root in this instance and cannot simply be destroyed.

<sup>383</sup> Thus, *Jesus* is said by some to be the true creator of the cosmos given this pivotal role in its becoming.

<sup>384</sup> However, the devil and all demonic and wicked beings are said to derive their existence from *Achamoth*’s negative passions; bizarrely, the devil is said to have knowledge of the Pleroma (where the *Demiurge* does not) because he is of a spiritual nature.

are of the same animal nature as himself (a substance which various Valentinians claim to belong to the right hand or the psychic) and also of the substance produced by *Achamoth's* negative passions (which is sometimes called left-handed).<sup>385</sup>

The *Demiurge* was compelled by his mother *Achamoth* to continue the creative process, who desired to produce images of the various *aeons* (or some suggest that *Jesus* desired to through *Achamoth's* instrumentality) without the *Demiurge* realising that this was the case. Thus, it is reported that the *Demiurge* is the Father and God of everything outside of the Pleroma.<sup>386</sup> In an attempt to intuitively or subconsciously mimic the structure of the Pleroma, he reportedly also fashioned seven heavens – at the top of which he dwelt – and *Achamoth* dwells in a heaven above him; in an intermediate habitation mediating between existence outside of the Pleroma and existence inside of it. This eightfold structure gives us another primary ‘Ogdoad.’ It is also reported that death and corruption are introduced into the fabric of finite existence through the *Demiurge's* creative activity.<sup>387</sup>

The *Demiurge* then created humanity by forming them from ‘an invisible substance consisting of fusible and fluid matter’ which he then breathed in to; giving them an animal nature after the image and likeness of his own form.<sup>388</sup> However, we are also told that *Achamoth*, manipulating the *Demiurge's* ignorance, secretly created *spiritual* beings – inspired by the forms of the angelic host that had accompanied *Jesus* – by depositing her production within the *Demiurge*, which he then inadvertently infused with animal souls.<sup>389</sup> Irenaeus claims that these secret spiritual beings were referred to as the *Ecclesia* as an ‘*exemplum*’ of the *Ecclesia* that dwells in the Pleroma.

From these accounts we can get a sense of the typical Valentinian anthropology: the threefold human composition including a material body, an animal soul (from the *Demiurge*) and a spiritual seed (secretly deposited by *Achamoth*).<sup>390</sup> The materialistic and animalistic aspects of the human constitution are conceived together as a type of temporary ‘womb’ carrying the

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<sup>385</sup> ‘Those of the representation are called “the Right Ones” and “Psychic” and “the Fiery Ones” and “the Middle Ones.” Those who belong to the arrogant thought...are called “the Left,” “Hylic,” “the Dark Ones,” and “the Last”’ (*TT XCVIII:XV-XX*, p.84).

<sup>386</sup> *AHI, V:II*, p.322.

<sup>387</sup> *AHI, V:IV*, p.323.

<sup>388</sup> *AHI, V:V*, p.323.

<sup>389</sup> The material body is conceived as a sought of temporary ‘womb’ carrying this spiritual capacity.

<sup>390</sup> *AHI, V:VI*, p.323.

spiritual component of the human person that is nurtured and grows towards a state of perfection until it is ready to be harvested.

From these observations, the extent to which the Valentinian figure of Sophia diverges from its biblical counterpart becomes stark. Within the biblical concept of Wisdom and its theology, there was a clear insistence on God's free and purposeful creation of the world. Wisdom's role within the creation of the world could either be understood as a poetic description of God's creative activity, or at its most developed, a creative or instrumental force at the service of God. Within the Valentinian narrative, there is no purposeful creation, there is no free creative act and there is no positive role played by Wisdom. What one can identify instead is that the production of the world could more appropriately be considered as a falling away from an ideal state of existence. Wisdom's role within this falling away is significant; she is portrayed to be its cause. Therefore, in contradiction to the biblical concept of Wisdom, Sophia here performs an entirely negative theological function.

As in the biblical presentation of the Wisdom figure, Sophia (in her fallen state) does still convey the divine presence of the Pleroma. However, this appears to be by an accident as opposed to being an intentional product of the divine creation. Within biblical Wisdom theology, there is a clear allusion to, and creative engagement with the creation narrative as presented in *Genesis*. Within the Valentinian narrative, the *Genesis account* is parodied; the figure of the Demiurge (the false God of this world) is said to be the cause of animal nature. Wisdom communicates divine presence through her duping of the Demiurge, in which she smuggles divine 'sparks' into a portion of humankind at their creation. What is clear from these observations is the fact that Valentinian Wisdom theology is entirely ahistorical; it is grounded in myth and an elaborate and imaginative cosmological metaphysics. If biblical wisdom theology grounded creative engagement with the world and its various cultures (in so far as every aspect of creation is related to Wisdom in some form), the Gnostic theology of wisdom supports the existence of an elite (those carrying the divine sparks), those outside of this ontology could seemingly have nothing positive to offer the Gnostic theologian.

We shall now explore the next major stage of this sapiential narrative – Valentinian eschatology.

### *Achamoth's Return to the Pleroma: Valentinian Eschatology.*

Irenaeus records that when these spiritual fragments have attained perfection, *Achamoth* is permitted re-entry into the Pleroma where she is subsequently conjoined with *Jesus* to form the last Pleromic dyad: the bride and the bridegroom. *Achamoth's* return is accompanied by the universal liberation of the spiritual seeds from their material bodies: 'the spiritual seed, again being divested of their animal souls, and becoming intelligent spirits [*πνεύματα νοερά/spiritus intellectuales*], shall...enter in within the Pleroma, and be bestowed as brides on those angels who wait upon the Saviour [*Jesus*].'<sup>391</sup> Some reports suggest that the fate of the *Demiurge* and those righteous people, which had not attained to perfection, will pass into the previous intermediary habitation of *Achamoth*, where there is some knowledge of the Pleroma. But, typically, it is suggested that all material and animal existence is utterly destroyed by a consuming fire which itself eventually burns out and ceases to exist.<sup>392</sup>

One theory, noted by Irenaeus, as to how this eschatological process is inaugurated (how the spiritual seeds come to reach maturity) is that the *Demiurge* produced a Christ (the historical Jesus of the Gospels) after his own animal nature. However, when being baptised by John the Baptist, the *Jesus* of the Pleroma descended upon the animal Christ in the form of a dove. The historical Jesus was therefore comprised of four principle components: the material, the animal, the spiritual seed, and the spirit of *Jesus* (the fruit of the Pleroma). However, when the historical Jesus was brought before Pilate, the *Jesus* of the Pleroma departed from him and his animal nature endured suffering and crucifixion whilst his spiritual components were not affected.<sup>393</sup> The *Jesus* of the Pleroma was said to have disclosed the truth and knowledge about the Pleroma, through his 'incarnation,' to the *Demiurge* and to those inhabited by the spiritual seed; encouraging them to grow towards perfection and to return to their Pleromic source.

We have already seen that within the biblical wisdom narrative, eschatology was envisaged as a supernatural fulfilment of creation. Within the *Wisdom of Solomon* this took the form of the

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<sup>391</sup> *AH I, VII:1*, P.325. The *VE* (XXXIX:XXX-XL, p.487) reports *Sophia's* restitution but with much less detail and elaboration. There is a similar case with the *TT* (CXXII-CXXX, pp.96-100) although there is significant development in detail.

<sup>392</sup> There are some references to animals (those of an animal nature) not being admitted within the Pleroma in Valentinian texts; see: *The Gospel of Phillip VXXIX: V-XI*, p.156.

<sup>393</sup> Although the logic of Valentinian Christology would seem to suggest a commitment to docetism; the various references to Christ's historical sufferings are not qualified with docetic positions as we might have expected. See, for instance; *GT XVIII:XX*, p.41.

soul's rewarded immortality, and for the New Testament writers this was participation in Christ's divine redemptive economy. In every instance, there was candid insistence on the priority of divine grace when it came to salvation and eschatology. However, from the Valentinian narrative we have discerned that correct *knowledge* is the only proprietor of salvation. Those who are able to discover their true ontological identities as aspects of a fallen deity are those that find salvation. Within this framework, the work of the individual is crucial, salvation cannot be obtained without human effort, and it is something humanly achievable through right understanding.

Within the biblical wisdom tradition, Wisdom, conceived as Christ, was understood to be concretely and historically incarnate within a human individual. At first glance, Wisdom as Christ appears to be playing a similar role within the Gnostic account. However, it is clearly evidenced that this Christ is not historically incarnate in any real sense, he simply gives the impression that he is, in an overt docetic Christology. This can be detected from the fact that the divine being inhabiting Jesus ascends to the Pleroma before his death. Christ's death and resurrection have no significance, as they evidently do for the New Testament wisdom theologians, Paul and John. Within the Gnostic narrative, it was only necessary that Christ passes on true knowledge to his disciples, from which they must then cultivate their own salvation.

Furthermore, the biblical wisdom tradition affirms that, although Wisdom can be manifested within one culture, or tradition, and indeed even within one individual, this never appears to detract from the fact that Wisdom is present in the whole of creation as well, due to sapiential creation theology. Therefore, every culture, religion, and person must in some sense be related to Wisdom and present themselves as something to be engaged with, even if this does not imply that they must ultimately be adopted. This, to some, may be considered a theologically uncomfortable idea, especially when it requires wisdom to be discerned within the most alien and, perhaps even challenging of ideologies. However, what can be concluded from the Gnostic wisdom tradition is the extent to which this engagement is barred from the very beginning. There is no creation theology within this narrative. The world is inherently problematic; its very existence was an accident of deviant behaviour within the divine Pleroma. Salvation occurs through the impartation of correct knowledge from a select elite of Gnostic hierarchs. This is not a theology of engagement with the world, but a theology which supports the power of the few



who have insight. It is therefore no surprise that those who fashioned this mythology also have a significant political and social stake in upholding its existence. However, that being acknowledged, Kurt Rudolph notes that: ‘there was no “Gnostic” church or normative theology, no Gnostic rule of faith nor any dogma of exclusive importance. No limits were set to free representation and theological speculation so far as they lay within the frame of the Gnostic view of the world.’<sup>394</sup> Thus, a certain amount of liberality could be ascribed to the Gnostic communities as long as they strictly adhered to the overarching framework.

Although very little is known about the sociological and political dynamics of individual Gnostic communities, there is scholarly agreement on the importance of elitism and the charismatic authority of the leader, in regulating the activity of the community. Gnostic wisdom theology clearly purports the ideological insistence on there being a chosen group of people ontologically superior to others from their very formation. Perhaps, this is the core Gnostic idea that later led Voegelin to draw comparisons between this system of ideas and twentieth century Nazi politics.

Having given an account of the basic Valentinian cosmological myth and noting *Sophia’s* role within it, we shall now move on to identifying and evaluating the specific philosophical and theological presuppositions and positions that generate this complicated and diverse mythology, its discursive rules of formation, before attempting to demonstrate that these same positions form a unity of discourse in contrast to the biblical concept of Wisdom, that we will call Valentinian wisdom theology.

### **The Rules of Formation for the Concept of Valentinian Wisdom Theology**

It would appear that it is possible to identify that the most fundamental theological and philosophical commitment of the Valentinians is to an original *ontological monism*; all existence is contained within, and is merely various modifications of one all-encompassing pantheistic divinity. This founding presupposition also reflexively posits their first philosophical problem, which is twofold in nature: if an original ontological monism is upheld then *why* and *how* is there otherness; or, put simply, what accounts for the possibility of the fractured *plurality* of finite existence (time, space, limitation, etc.) which presents itself as so radically opposed to any monistic totality. The Valentinians therefore find themselves in an incredibly peculiar situation;

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<sup>394</sup> Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, p.53.

for their most basic conviction is immediately contradicted by the reality which they themselves inhabit. Thus, it would appear that we can note that the very notion of *creation*, *finitude* and *otherness* is *inherently problematic* within the Valentinian system. This awkward fact then gives rise to the unique Valentinian (although perhaps Gnostic more broadly) phenomenon of *existential alienation*. Valentinians are *intuitively* aware of their infinite origins and long to return ‘home;’ which is necessarily accompanied by a desire for the negation of finite limitation and historical existence. Thus, the question as to why there is finitude and otherness is answered with the negative rejection of its intrinsic value: although it is the case, it should not be. Furthermore, these specific ontological presuppositions are also accompanied by some foundational *eschatological* premises. Namely, that the Valentinian’s ‘alienated existence’ (the one contradicting the monistic totality) will itself be contradicted and absorbed back into the totality, which will represent the consummation of history (e.g. its negation in its identification with the primal unity).

From these brief observations it becomes quite clear how the response to the ‘why question’ immediately leads to the specific myths that we encountered above as an imaginative response to the accompanying ‘how question.’

Therefore, the Valentinian myths, when conceived as explanations responding to the philosophical problems that have been generated by their foundational presuppositions, can be conveniently divided into two parts: the cosmological narrative - that responds to the origins of finite existence and otherness - and the soteriological and eschatological narrative, which seeks to account for the negation of finite otherness.

The crux of the myth is centred on the figure of *Sophia*, whose role within the narrative is to explain that which is the case (finite reality), but which should never have been the case. *Sophia*’s unnatural desire, although apparently initiating higher up in the aeonic chain, appears to be the result of *ignorance*. This introduces disharmony into the Pleroma – a sort of counter force that must be extradited for the primal harmony to resume. This extradition duplicates *Sophia*’s existence into one that remains within the Pleroma and *another* that is expelled outside of it. *Sophia*’s exile narrates a primal unity that was disrupted by an alien force that has produced *otherness* and finite existence outside of the totality. It is important to note that the plurality to have emerged accidentally out of the original unity is still ontologically bound up with the

wholeness of the Pleroma; finite history is, essentially, a parody of the infinite totality, which itself contains alienated ‘aspects’ of that original unity within its new mode of existence. Thus, the Pleroma cannot simply remain unaffected by this anomaly; it must negate the negation of itself in order to recapture the initial harmony that it once possessed. Thus, Valentinian thought harbours the paradox of its disdain for history alongside its inestimable value in so far as it is bound to the Pleroma. This leads us on to the soteriological and eschatological dynamics of the myth.

The aeon *Christ* descends from the Pleroma with the intention of inaugurating the process that will eventually lead to her return. *Christ’s* appearance excites an intuitive awareness of *fallen Sophia’s* original wholeness and unity within the Pleroma and, subsequently, a *desire* to correct her mutated existence. The process of ‘creation,’ that begins after *Christ’s* descent, offers further elucidation on how the average Valentinian conceives of his/her ontological status.

*Achamoth’s* manipulation of the Demiurge’s creativity produces three essential anthropological components, which are comprised of the material, the animal, and the ‘spiritual seeds.’ The spiritual component, deposited by *Achamoth*, is directly related to the Pleroma and, in a sense, is an aspect of it. This ‘seed’ is what is ultimately destined to be reabsorbed back into the monistic unity, while everything else which constitutes the human person shall either be destroyed or left outside of it. We are then left with the question as to how this will take place.

The ‘incarnation’ of the historical Jesus of Nazareth, who was initially sent by the *Demiurge* and was composed of the threefold substances just mentioned, was transformed during his baptism when the Pleromic Jesus descended down on him. Thus, the standard Valentinian Christology upholds a fourfold division within Christ; including the three basic anthropological substances as well as an additional spiritual constituent: the Pleromic Jesus. The role of this messiah is to impart knowledge of the truth (the true ontological status of those carrying the spiritual seed) and to grow the seeds until they reach fruition and are ready to be harvested (return to the fullness of the Pleroma and negate finite existence).

Having briefly discussed the rules of formation for the concept of Valentinian Wisdom theology, focussing on the philosophical and theological problems that produced such a concept,

and having already noted its sociological and political significance for establishing an elite hierarchy, we shall now outline the concept itself.

### **The Concept of Valentinian Wisdom Theology**

#### *Cosmological dimension*

i) Within the Valentinian narrative, *Sophia* functions as an explanation for existence outside of the Pleroma; put simply, she responds theologically to the cardinal Valentinian problem; why and how is there finitude and otherness. Her function is, in one way or another, to narrate the dissolution of the primal monistic unity; which subsequently results in the duplication of her being; *Sophia* within the Pleroma and a ‘fallen’ external *Sophia*.

It is important to note that many have attempted to draw parallels between Valentinian theology and Neoplatonic philosophy,<sup>395</sup> despite Plotinus’ (204-270) famous protestations to the contrary.<sup>396</sup> However, there appears to be a fundamental disparity between both systems at this embryonic stage in the narrative, which O’Regan highlights excellently: ‘classical Neoplatonism’s vision of the One as unitive source...diffuses itself for *no other reason than perfection’s tendency to communicate itself*...the One is sufficiently without the shadow of deficiency.’<sup>397</sup> And it is for *this reason* that the Neoplatonic narrative requires a circular plot; because there can be no *higher state* of perfection that the One does not already possess. This appears to be contradicted by Valentinian cosmology that upholds the paradoxical position that it was precisely a *lack of perfection* (ignorance) that resulted in a *loss of perfection*: the original totality.

ii) The ontological duality of *Sophia* is no purposeful or harmoniously constructed relationship between divinity and ‘created’ existence; but, is instead, comprised by radical ontological opposition and competition. This ‘clashing of opposites’ occurs on two fronts; firstly, on the

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<sup>395</sup> See, for instance: Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (trans: Robert Wallace), Cambridge, MIT, 1985, pp.125-229; Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth* (trans: Robert Wallace), Cambridge, MIT, 1990; John Dillon, ‘Pleroma and Noetic Cosmos: A Comparative Study,’ in: Richard Wallis (ed), *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, New York, State University of New York, 1992, pp.99-110.

<sup>396</sup> See, Plotinus’, under Porphyry’s numbering system, Ennead II, Tractate IX; and for a detailed discussion of it, see: Christos Evangelou, Plotinus’s Anti-Gnostic Polemic and Porphyry’s Against the Christians,’ in: Richard Wallis (ed), *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, New York, State University of New York, 1992, pp.111-128.

<sup>397</sup> Cyril O’Regan, *Gnostic Return in Modernity*, New York, State University of New York, 2001, p.79 (my emphasis).

fideistic front, finitude contradicts the Valentinian belief in an infinite monistic first principle, and secondly, on a logical level, given that being is predicated univocally of the Pleromic Sophia and fallen Sophia respectively. Therefore, this initial cosmological narrative, as well as Sophia's first theological function, must be negated in order to affirm the truth of the first Valentinian theological presupposition and to restore logical harmony.

This mutually intertwining relationship is perhaps best outlined in the role of the *spiritual* seeds, deposited into the Demiurge's animal creation yet bound to their heavenly mother, come to the fullest realisation of their existence only in the destruction of their material and finite home. It follows necessarily then that finitude and that which has caused it must be conceived opprobriously (hence, Sophia's participation in the divine economy is always accompanied by the myth of the Demiurge to affirm its accidental nature). This leads us to the soteriological and eschatological elements of the narrative.

#### *Soteriology and Eschatology*

i) Valentinian soteriology and eschatology appears to be governed by the necessity of the narrative ending in the dissolution of finite existence (represented by Sophia's fallen existence) in its re-absorption back into the Pleromic whole. Thus, given that fallen Sophia has already implanted aspects of her own Pleromic nature into the animal creation, these then function as the potentiality for recognising, intuitively, Jesus of the Pleroma when he descends in his 'incarnation' to impart knowledge of the Pleroma and of the spiritual seeds. This occurs by exciting a *desire* for the Pleroma and dissatisfaction with their current mode of existence (existential alienation) accompanied by the means of removing these tensions by moving towards an eschatological solution.

ii) *Sophia's* eschatological role within the Valentinian narrative results in the dissolution of the duplicity of her existence. The fallen *Sophia* is re-absorbed back into the fullness of the monistic Pleroma, at the expense of otherness and finitude. There is, therefore, a synthetic restitution of the ontological and logical difficulties integral to Valentinian wisdom theology.

#### *General tenets*

It is worth briefly outlining some of the important regulative positions that appear to be inherent to the concept of Valentinian sapiential thought.

i) *Narrative flexibility*, as we have already seen, plays a major part in the Valentinian responses to the philosophical problems that their founding religious positions lead to. The mythological explanations can vary to greater or lesser extents when responding to the principle why and how questions that we looked at, but in every instance these responses are informed and regulated by these same questions.

ii) *Myth making* has been a characteristic of many philosophical schools, ancient and modern, usually employed, as was the case with Plato for instance, to illustrate a philosophical point; a pedagogic tool. However, whilst there are some traces of this phenomenon occurring in the Valentinian myths, their legitimacy is also grounded in their first theological principle. Given the fact that finitude has broken away from an original whole, and even still retains aspects of it within itself, the Valentinians can think of themselves as being privy to knowledge that would allude others. Their myths, therefore, can make theological and philosophical sense because they already have a ‘prior experience’ of that which they are describing, given their Pleromic origins. In theological language, within Valentinian theology, cataphatic expressions do not need to be qualified by apophatic denials as they would have to be in Christian orthodoxy, precisely because they have internal access to the Pleroma.

iii) Valentinian Gnosticism does not uphold the possibility of a historical incarnation of divinity. Given the fact that matter is not something purposefully created, divinity can have no part in it.

iv) Salvation occurs through originary *knowledge*. The purpose of the Valentinian ‘incarnation’ is for the messiah to reveal salvific knowledge to its adherents; knowledge is what saves.

We have critically compared the concept of Valentinian wisdom with the biblical concept of Wisdom throughout this chapter, but we shall briefly summarize the major points of continuity and disparity.

Firstly, and most significantly, the founding theological/philosophical monistic presupposition of Valentinian thought is starkly contradicted by the biblical affirmation of a purposeful divine *creation* that is freely given; placing no constraints or limitations on God. According to the

biblical account the creative act is neither solicited nor provoked and is supremely good in so far as it is in utter accordance with God's good will. This crucial distinction would appear to refuse the possibility of construing the figure of Wisdom as a pivotal component in a mythological tragedy that narrates the fracture of an original monistic whole but, rather, is a purposeful *creation* that communicates God's presence to the world; a personified relationship that is not comprised of dialectical conflict and tension, but of ontological harmony, which is further *instrumental* in the divine economy. Therefore, although both concepts portray Wisdom as having an active role in the formation of the world and maintain her presence within that same order, both are distinguished on the grounds of how this takes place and whether or not it is conceived as a positive or as a negative.

In the Valentinian myth, *Sophia's* mediatory role between unity (the Pleroma) and otherness (existence external to the Pleroma) is inherently problematic and even contradictory, in so far as there is no real otherness to mediate between, since it is simply an accidental duplication of the same original whole, which must ultimately end in the negation of one or the other, or alternatively, are held together in mutual contradiction; within the biblical account, *Sophia's* mediation is not constituted by this either/or dichotomy; it sustains a harmonious and non-competitive relationship 'between' God and creation precisely because they do not belong to a common ontological category, which is also why she embodies both without contradiction, yet with purposefulness given that this relationship is grounded in their analogical relationship through the act of creation itself.

Furthermore, in biblical conceptions of *Sophia*, Christ is the measure of Wisdom's theological functions of mediation. However, within the Valentinian proposal, the original purpose is to account for the reality of finitude in light of an infinite whole, this is what stimulates Sophiological reflection for the Valentinian. Thus, there is a clear reversal of theological priorities in the respective narratives.

Within Valentinian eschatology, as we have already seen, *Sophia's* 'creaturely' existence (and those divine seeds pertaining to her fallen mode) is ultimately negated in the interests of restoring the original unity lost by disobedience and ignorance. *Otherness* cannot be sustained within the Valentinian *Sophia* precisely because, according to their foundational theological principle, there should be no such thing. Although like the Valentinian concept, the biblical

figure of Wisdom was said to bring creation close to God and grant immortality to souls and invite the world into Wisdom's relationship to the divine, this does not appear to require the negation of the world in this process.

We noted in the text some deeper more general disparities between the two concepts. These were briefly discussed within the introduction and now appear to be fully accounted for. Firstly, Valentinian wisdom theology emphasises the salvific role of originary knowledge. It is correct knowledge that cultivates salvation, not divine grace as is the case with the biblical wisdom tradition. Secondly, the biblical concept of Wisdom was grounded, initially in the historical context of the Jewish people and later in the early Christians' attempts to comprehend the event of Christ. Wisdom, in this context, is therefore thoroughly concrete and historical. However, within the Valentinian conception of Wisdom, clear precedence is given to the role of myth. In many respects, Valentinian wisdom theology could be considered ahistorical, in so far as the material world's intrinsic value is denied in favour of the mythological ideal of the Pleroma. This then has an effect on the reality of the incarnation of Wisdom/Christ. For the Valentinian, Wisdom/Christ could not be concretely incarnated on account of the fact that the ideal Wisdom figure could have no natural place within a material body. Whereas, for the biblical conception of Wisdom, the incarnation appears to be in congruence with the created, material world, it is its crowning glory as it were.

Within the above analysis, we also detected some distinct political and social implications of the two respective discourses. Firstly, the biblical tradition appeared to require engagement with the world, not only due to the multicultural context of the Hebrew people that forced them to adapt and in some cases adopt foreign culture in order to maintain the existence of the Jewish identity, but because of the inherent value of the world's various cultures which had to be construed as being related, in some sense to Wisdom, as *everything* was created through her. In distinction to this point, the Valentinian discourse appeared to engender a different social and political approach. Within this concept, the world is indiscriminately evil, that which is positive is not from the world but from the ideal Pleroma. Those outside of this ontological category would be considered as lesser persons. Little if any engagement with cultures and systems of thought outside this circumference would be permitted, because nothing positive could be obtained. The Gnostics are the ones with correct knowledge, which they must impart, without the



need of learning from alternate systems of thought. That being noted, freedom of thought within the Gnostic system itself was positively encouraged and not seemingly hierarchically governed or organized. However, this rule applied only insofar as the rudiments of the Gnostic commitments were upheld.

### **Summative Remarks**

Within this chapter we have attempted to provide an archaeology for the Valentinian figure of Wisdom. We have analysed the rules of formation for the concept of Wisdom and the concept itself, as well as some of the potential political and social motivations for producing an authoritative concept of this particular sort. We critically compared these findings to those outlined in the previous chapter, noting points of continuity as well as discontinuity and why this was the case and some of the implications of these distinctions. We shall now turn our attention to the emergence of wisdom theology within the modern period. However, before we can do this we must investigate the rules of its formation. What context produced this particular type of wisdom theology in the modern period, what circumstances had a part in its emergence and popularity? Modern wisdom theology circumstantially grew out of theological engagement with German Idealism. Thus, its formative context can be considered to be this same philosophical tradition, as well as other factors. An archaeology would therefore require an assessment of this context in order to unearth the type of questions and circumstances that produce this particular type of wisdom theology, giving us an insight into the nature of the concept itself. We shall now begin to explore post-Kantian Idealism and how it contributed to producing a particular type of wisdom theology within modern British theology.

### **Chapter III**

#### **The Monistic Turn of Post-Kantian Idealism, from Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819) to Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814): The Rules of Formation for Modern Valentinian Speculation.**

In the previous two chapters an archaeology for both the biblical and Valentinian conceptions of Wisdom were outlined; offering a critical comparison, considering differences and similarities, between these two unities of discourse. Before assessing modern theological adoptions and adaptations of these two ‘traditions,’ we first need to account for the archaeological conditions that have produced modern theological wisdom discourses of this ilk. As already noted within the introduction, one of the major cultural and philosophical events and contexts that must be considered when engaging with modern wisdom theologies is German Idealism. Within this period of philosophical history, a certain set of distinctive questions and problems emerge, acting as one of the pivots on which a series of philosophies and theologies (including those of Hegel, Schelling and the Russian wisdom theologians) later rotate on. It shall be argued within the contents of this chapter, that these questions and problems can be considered as *archaeological shifts* relating to their earlier development within the Valentinian wisdom discourse discussed in the previous chapter. The archaeological significance of this point should not be underestimated, in so far as this will later provide the frame from within which modern wisdom theologies shall develop.<sup>398</sup>

The philosophical questions and problems that we have just alluded to, to be discussed shortly, could be considered to be the product of a specific conception of the relationship between the infinite and the finite or the Absolute and creation, which succinctly arise out of Immanuel Kant’s ‘*Ding an Sich*’ and, specifically, how it comes to be interpreted, transformed, and ultimately rejected. In order to demonstrate this point, the chapter will essentially involve close analysis of the significant historical events which shaped this development, beginning with F.H.

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<sup>398</sup> Fichte has nearly always avoided the Gnostic characterisations that have been attributed to Schelling and Hegel, apart from Jurgen Gebhardt and Holgor Zaborowski who have hinted at Fichte’s relationship to Gnosticism. See: Jurgen Gebhardt, ‘Political Eschatology and Soteriological Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Germany’, in: Athanasios Moulakis (ed), *The Promise of History: Essays in Political Philosophy*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1985, pp.51-69, p.65; Holgor Zaborowski, ‘Fall and Freedom: a Comparison of Fichte’s and Saint Paul’s Understanding of Original Sin’, in: Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (eds), *After Jena: New Essays on Fichte’s Later Philosophy*, Northwestern University Press, 2008, pp.162-183.

Jacobi and the ‘Spinozism controversy’ (1783-1787) and culminating in J.G. Fichte’s ‘Jena’ writings. However, firstly, Kant’s conception of the ‘thing in itself’ must be defined, so to be able to determine just precisely what it is that Kant’s interpreters would be engaging with.

### **Kant’s *Ding an Sich*.**

Initially, the question of how the Absolute relates to the world was framed and answered primarily by Kant from within an epistemological framework; continuing the Cartesian initiative, Kant separated and prioritised epistemology over ontology when embarking on his first critique, which would ultimately chart the bounds of finitude<sup>399</sup> by way of a thorough examination of the conditions (intuition and concepts) which ‘constitute...the elements of all our knowledge.’<sup>400</sup> One of the purposes for such an investigation<sup>401</sup> was to identify the ‘point at which [pure] reason [began] to misunderstand itself,’<sup>402</sup> by demonstrating - based on the limitations of reason - what could and could not be thought by finite intellects and therefore, what could and could not be known or expressed by human reason. Having done this, he hoped to be able to rule out or ‘dismiss all groundless pretensions’<sup>403</sup> that had so far been apparent within metaphysics, simply by pointing to his *a priori* ‘eternal and unalterable laws of reason.’<sup>404</sup> Therefore, the epistemological turn was meant to prevent the type of ‘groundless’ speculation produced by ‘traditional’ metaphysics that resulted from – as far as Kant could see – the blending of epistemology and ontology, principally exercised by Plato, which resulted in ‘the false belief that we could experience *a priori* cognitions directly as *a priori* intuitions.’<sup>405</sup>

Kant’s dogmatic distinction between the comprehensible and the incomprehensible opens up the possibility of a dualism existing in every object encountered by finite sensibility and understanding: an object as an ‘appearance,’ something that is accessible to reason; however,

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<sup>399</sup> A young Martin Heidegger notes that the question of finitude is at the base of Kant’s attempt to ‘ground’ metaphysics: ‘the laying of the ground for metaphysics is grounded in the question concerning the finitude in human beings’ (Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (trans: Richard Taft), Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1997, p.152).

<sup>400</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (trans: Marcus Weigelt), London, 2007, A50 = B74, p.85.

<sup>401</sup> One could also consider the first critique to be an attempt to overcome Humean scepticism, as well as an attempt to produce a system that mediated between Newtonian physics - the world as an enclosed machine, functioning on the basis of necessary and mechanical laws - with Leibniz’s insistence on the necessary interaction between the world and the metaphysical.

<sup>402</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (trans: Marcus Weigelt), London, 2007, Axiiv = xiv, p.8.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid, Axi = xii, p.7.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid, Axi = xii, p.7.

<sup>405</sup> Chris L. Firestone, *Kant and Theology at the Boundaries of Reason*, Surrey, Ashgate, 2009, p.46.

since this is the only manner in which an object could occur and be known by a finite intellect, there is also the possibility of the same object existing ‘outside’ of its finite comprehension as it is ‘in-itself.’ The former is commonly known as the phenomenal realm, where appearances occur, and the latter, the noumenal realm, where the possibility of ‘things existing in themselves’ materializes. Initially, such a dualism presents problems to pure reason, by way of antinomies, in respect to their mutual relation; as it would seem to be, for instance, logically impossible for natural laws (as phenomena), to co-exist with freedom (as a thing-in-itself) without one negating the other. Kant specifically highlights four such antinomies that he attempts to ‘resolve’ in his ‘transcendental dialectic.’<sup>406</sup> The one given above comprises his ‘third dynamical antinomy,’ which he ‘solves’ by suggesting that the apparent contradiction is only present when one mistakes appearances for things-in-themselves; thus portraying an either/or situation, where both now occupy mutually exclusive ground. However, when one adopts ‘transcendental idealism’ or dualism, Kant argues that both can be affirmed without contradiction,<sup>407</sup> as they are no longer mutually exclusive; the phenomenal and the noumenal realms are not competing for the same ‘space.’ Thus, the finite intellect will only ever see freedom as naturally necessitated, as that is the only way in which freedom, as noumena, could present itself to a finite mind - as a phenomenal appearance. So it is possible, from Kant’s perspective, to suggest that a free act could indeed be free, even though it occurs, in appearance, as something which is naturally necessitated. Although, one could legitimately ask, in that case, why should one ever posit the existence of any noumena at all? Kant’s response to this question is that, in the *practical reason* or facts of reason, there exists the ‘categorical imperative’ which reveals that we should freely determine ourselves in a specific way according to a *moral ‘ought,’* which can paradoxically ‘direct’ natural necessity to comply with it; thus making us practically aware of noumena as something which are distinct from mere phenomena.<sup>408</sup> Undoubtedly, his distinction between practical and theoretical reason is another dualism, just like the ‘thing’ and the ‘thing in itself,’ and also the dualism existing between the intuition and the understanding, all three are mutually

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<sup>406</sup> A numerical restriction that Kant will later be taken to task for - along with his proposed resolutions to the antinomies - by Hegel. See: G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic* (trans: A.V. Miller), New York, HB, 1999, p.191.

<sup>407</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A531 = B559, p.462.

<sup>408</sup> Kant’s famous examples of the lustful man’s inclination being curbed by the presence of the gallows and a man’s willingness to overcome his love of life by refusing to bear false witness against an honourable man on a crooked prince’s whim are meant to demonstrate that spontaneity can be distinguished from natural necessity. See: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (trans: Thomas Abbott), 2004, London, p.30.

conditioned by each other. The ‘solutions’ themselves only further emphasise the fact that we can have no *conceptual* insight into things-in-themselves.

As was suggested above, since no theoretical knowledge is permitted of the noumena, one may assume that this dualism would result in the end of metaphysics. However, although this is partially true, for Kant an enormous amount still depends on the *ontological reality* of things-in-themselves; after all, without ‘noumenal’ freedom, God, or the immortality of the soul ‘all...moral principles would be overthrown.’<sup>409</sup> Thus, practical reason demands the reality of the noumena, but since it is impossible to ‘know’ of their reality despite their ‘practical necessity,’<sup>410</sup> Kant will have to radically redirect metaphysics if he is to sustain his philosophy. From henceforth, any ‘insight’ into the noumenal realm must now take place within the practical reason. So those questions, which traditional metaphysics were concerned with, namely, the existence of God or the immortality of the soul, still remain extremely significant, only now, the emphasis must shift from their ‘provability’ (of course impossible for Kant in a theoretical sense) to their utility as ‘regulative principles,’ providing both a satisfying conceptual tidiness for pure reason, that is ‘impelled by a tendency of its nature to go beyond its use in experience...to the outer limits of all knowledge,’<sup>411</sup> and as a practical necessity in securing the value of morality. Kant will even go so far as to provide the so called ‘moral proofs’ for the immortality of the soul and the existence of God in his second critique as necessary postulates of practical reason.<sup>412</sup> However, despite the practical necessity of these noumena providing the possibility of an ‘insight’ into their reality, this is by no means a *conceptual* insight; hence the radical distinction between the theoretical and the practical reason within Kant’s philosophy, which includes the priority of the latter. The only concepts that we have of noumena are as regulative principles given to us conceptually through analogy so as for us not to be left with nothing. Kant’s model of analogy is not an imperfect similarity between two things, but, rather, a ‘perfect similarity between two relations in wholly dissimilar things.’<sup>413</sup> Thus, reason is satisfied with a concept of *relation*, but this provides it with no direct theoretical knowledge of the noumena.

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<sup>409</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A828 = B856, p.650.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid, A812 = B840, p.640.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid, A797 = B825, p.630.

<sup>412</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp.130-141.

<sup>413</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics* (trans: Gary Hatfield), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004 p.108. Kant’s famous example of his analogy of relation is: ‘the promotion of the happiness

Ultimately, Kant provides us with two utterly distinct realms, upheld by the limitations of finitude, which in turn are ‘marked’ by the ‘in itself.’ We are told that these realms are utterly removed from one another and that there is no possibility of the noumena traversing this divide without itself ceasing to be noumena. The presence of ‘things in themselves’ within sensible intuitions can only occur by appearing as just another instance of phenomenal reality. Theoretically, therefore, it is impossible to distinguish the two. The distinction occurs in practical reason, where given the presence of a ‘categorical imperative’, we can at least posit the ‘reality’ of noumena as freedom, which becomes a necessary postulate for practical reason.<sup>414</sup>

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of the children = A is to the love of the parents = B as the welfare of humankind = C is to the unknown in God’ (Ibid, p.109).

<sup>414</sup> There has been some recent suggestion that Kant’s dualisms are somewhat artificial; interpretations which he initially fuels himself by implying, in his introduction to the first critique, that: ‘there are two stems of human knowledge, namely sensibility and understanding, which perhaps spring from a *common root* unknown to us’ (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (trans: Marcus Weigelt), London, 2007, A16 = B30, p.55). The statement which Terry Pinkard suggests would have had those around Kant asking the question as to whether there was not in fact a cryptic monism lying behind this suggestion, that could perhaps be claiming that the other dualisms such as ‘appearances and things-in-themselves...nature and freedom were...only different *aspects* of some one underlying, absolute reality’ (Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.92). After all, as shall be seen, the post-Kantian idealists always insisted that they were simply following the ‘spirit’ (The ‘spirit’ (general direction) of Kantian philosophy is the term used by several of the post-Kantians to be distinguished from the ‘letter’ (strict or static reading) of Kantian thought. Some of the post-Kantians used this distinction to highlight their novelty while maintaining their alliance with the Kantian project, which was distinguished from others, who according to Reinhold were ‘slaves to the letter of their master’ (K.L. Reinhold, ‘The Foundation of Philosophical Knowledge’, in George Di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (eds), *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, Cambridge, Hackett, 2000, pp.51-104, p.79) of Kantian philosophy to its logical conclusion when transforming it into a monistic system. Even more recent Kantian scholars have advocated a similar position; Henry Allison, for instance, has suggested that the distinction between the phenomena and the noumena is utterly unrelated to any notion of transcendence; he suggests that it is simply a distinction that occurs through different ways of interpreting empirical objects (Karl Ameriks, ‘The Practical Foundation of Philosophy in Kant, Fichte, and After,’ in Sally Sedgwick (ed), *The Reception of Kant’s Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.109-129, p.114. See: Henry Allison, *Idealism and Freedom: Essays on Kant’s Theoretical and Practical Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996. For similar readings, see: Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996). However, Kant himself, according to the ‘letter’ of, at least the works published in his lifetime, never endorsed such monistic interpretations; he even identified Spinoza’s monistic claim to have grasped the one substance by pure thought as a ‘transcendental illusion,’ which obviously went beyond the limits of possible experience (Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.92). He also categorically rejects Spinozistic monism in the second critique on the ground that it would undermine the entire enterprise of the metaphysics of morals (See: the ‘Critical Examination of the Analytic of Pure Practical Reason,’ in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (trans: Thomas Kingsmill Abbott), New York, 2004, pp.94-113). However, the later Kant –especially in the *Opus Postumum*, perhaps influenced by the early reception of his thought – began to present the monism of Spinoza in a different light. There is a large amount of ambiguity concerning Kant’s complicated relationship to monism in these writings. Some of his remarks even seem to suggest that ‘Spinoza qualifies as a representative of transcendental idealism’ (Jeffrey Edwards, ‘Spinozism, Freedom, and Transcendental Dynamics in Kant’s Final System of Transcendental Idealism,’ in Sally Sedgwick, *The Reception of Kant’s Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling and Hegel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.54-78, p.55). Compare, for example, just one of Kant’s comments in the *Opus*

This is a brusque interpretation of the Kantian legacy that would be engaged with, interpreted and ultimately rejected by the post-Kantians. Despite the monumental influence that Kant's philosophy had on those who came after him, the overall consensus quickly found that there were problems within the Kantian project; that it was incomplete and vulnerable to sceptical and dogmatic (realist) critiques. The primary motive for this consensus hinged on the nature of the Kantian dualisms and how they were received and interpreted; the context of which would lead post-Kantian thought in a very specific direction that called for Kant's thought to be completed *via* a new monistic foundation that would provide the framework for Gnostic systems of thought to emerge within this philosophical discourse. We shall now explore this hermeneutical process.

### **The 'Spinozsim Controversy': Jacobi and the Critique of Rationalism.**

One of the most significant events that would unwittingly shape the immediate reception and interpretation of Kant, along with much post-Kantian philosophical inquiry, would turn out to be a somewhat heated exchange of written correspondence between Jacobi and Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) – an event that has come to be known as the 'Spinozism controversy' (1783-1787). Although, on the surface, a heated exchange between two philosophers does not imply anything extraordinary, it would come to be acknowledged as 'one of the most significant intellectual events in late eighteenth century Germany.'<sup>415</sup>

After the death of G.E. Lessing (1729-1781), his friend of many years, Mendelssohn was reportedly preparing something of an intellectual eulogy for the deceased Lessing. However,

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*Postumum* – 'the thing-in-itself is *not* an object given outside of representation' (Immanuel Kant, *Opus Postumum* (trans: Eckart Förster), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.173) - to his first critique, and note the apparent drastic shift in thought; although, as Jeffrey Edwards, amongst others, have noted (See: Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism 1781-1801*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2008, pp. 210-211) scholars are far from coming to any conclusive opinion on this topic (Jeffrey Edwards, 'Spinozism, Freedom, and Transcendental Dynamics in Kant's Final System of Transcendental Idealism', in Sally Sedgwick, *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling and Hegel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.54-78, p.55). Edwards himself seems to suggest that Kant was forced to start coming to terms with Spinozism in regards to his own system when exploring the transcendental dynamics of material nature. Others, such as Lord, suggest that the Kantian 'ether' which is at the heart of his remarks on Spinozism, remains categorically distinct from God and freedom, which prevents an identity between transcendental idealism and Spinozism (Beth Lord, *Kant and Spinozism: Transcendental Idealism and Immanence from Jacobi to Deleuze*, Hampshire, Palgrave, 2011, p.182). Frederick Beiser also fails to see a notable shift between the first critique and the *Opus Postumum* (See: Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism 1781-1801*, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2008, pp. 210-214).

<sup>415</sup> Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1993, p.45.

once Mendelssohn's intention had come to Jacobi's attention, the latter resolved to write a letter to the former revealing that Lessing had confided in him that he was in fact a 'Spinozist.'<sup>416</sup> At this point, Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677) was still very much a soiled name in German academic and public life; it was more often than not simply equated with atheism. To accuse someone of Spinozism, especially a figure as well-known and respected as Lessing, had all the ingredients for a public scandal. Jacobi's main problem with Spinozism was that it represented, in his view, the inevitable culmination of all rationalism which had to be rejected for reasons that shall be seen. Initially, Mendelssohn took offence to Jacobi's accusations, although he would ultimately accept the accuracy of Jacobi's reports about Lessing, but simply putting it down to one of his bizarre philosophical outbursts, which he was apparently prone to, and therefore not to be taken too seriously. However, Mendelssohn found Jacobi's attacks on rationalism far more problematic and attempted to refute them on several occasions.<sup>417</sup>

Jacobi's critiques of rationalism are sporadically scattered throughout his writings, but they can be condensed to one main objection to a specific position; a position which itself led logically to several other conclusions that Jacobi would also reject. At the heart of the rationalism that Jacobi was refuting was in fact, what is typically known after G.W. Leibniz (1646-1716), as the 'principle of sufficient reason,'<sup>418</sup> or as Jacobi preferred to call it: '*a nihilo*

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<sup>416</sup> Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.93. For Jacobi's personal account of Lessing's revelation, see: F.H. Jacobi, 'Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn.' Lessing's 'confession' was apparently occasioned by Jacobi handing Lessing Goethe's poem *Prometheus* to read, they then debated the implications of the poem which led Lessing to explicitly concede that he was a pantheist. See: F.H. Jacobi, 'Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn', in George di Giovanni (trans/ed), *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, London, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009, pp.181-200.

<sup>417</sup> For an overview of these see: Micah Gottlieb, *Faith and Freedom: Moses Mendelssohn's Theological-Political Thought*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, pp.31-75.

<sup>418</sup> Leibniz coined the term 'principle of sufficient reason:' 'all contingent propositions have reasons for being as they are rather than otherwise, or they have *a priori* proofs for their truth' (G.W. Leibniz, 'First Principles: Foundations of the Sciences', in Phillip Wiener, *Leibniz Selections*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951, p.94). It was in fact his commitment to this principle that led him to suggest that God must have created the best world out of a whole host of various other possibilities; this provides the principle with a reason for God creating the world, otherwise God's creation of the world would be inexplicable and therefore irrational, as Leibniz notes: 'In my opinion, if there were no best possible series, God would have certainly created nothing, since he cannot act without a reason' (Ibid, p.95). The earliest use of the principle, following Aristotle's indication, was most probably in the pre-Socratic Anaximander (c.610-456); who adapted a specific geometric idea into a 'general expression for the principle of symmetry or indifference; it is indeed the same notion which was glorified in modern times by Leibniz as his principle of sufficient reason' (Charles Kahn, *Anaximander and the Origins of Greek Cosmology*, Cambridge, Hackett Publishing, 1994, p.77).



*nihil fit.*<sup>419</sup> Although Spinoza does not use the former term, the explanatory reasoning in part one of his *Ethics*, leads Michael Della Rocca to conclude that ‘Spinoza employs the principle of sufficient reason more systematically, perhaps, than has ever been done in the history of philosophy.’<sup>420</sup> For Jacobi, the conclusions that Spinoza reaches are the unavoidable outcomes of the principle of sufficient reason pursued to its logical end.<sup>421</sup> The accuracy of Jacobi’s reading of Spinoza has been questioned,<sup>422</sup> but nevertheless, the ‘correctness’ of Jacobi’s reading is not of any real concern here; whether it was ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ has very little effect on the historical outcomes of his reading, which is what occupies the primary concern of the current juncture of this chapter. Jacobi contends that the logical implications of the principle of sufficient reason are as follows: if every reason has a reason there is the demand for a unique self-explanatory reason; a first cause. Spinoza, as Jacobi reads him, claims that this first cause can be neither transcendent nor rational,<sup>423</sup> which in turn implies that the first cause is a single absolute substance of which everything else must necessarily be mere modifications of.<sup>424</sup> In the first instance, the first cause cannot transcend its effects, either through its priority or its modality; through its priority, because if it were to be temporally prior to its causes it would need a further explanatory reason, which would mean it would no longer be the first cause; through its modality, because if the first cause did not require further explanatory ground and it was capable of existing independently of

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<sup>419</sup> F.H. Jacobi, ‘Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn’, in George di Giovanni (trans/ed), *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi: The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, London, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009, p.187.

<sup>420</sup> Michael Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, New York, Routledge, 2008, p.30.

<sup>421</sup> Jacobi appeared to have a genuine existential fear of the conclusions of the principle of sufficient reason; fear that was most likely aroused in him by a mystical vision that he had as a young boy. Whilst attempting to ponder the notion of infinity he went in to a sought of trance that presented two unbearable conclusions to him: ‘the thought of annihilation, which had always been dreadful to me, now became even more dreadful, nor could I bear the vision of an eternal forward duration any better [one is reminded of the Hegelian bad infinity]. So powerful were the effects of this extraordinary experience, Jacobi had reason to suspect that he could ‘arbitrarily evoke it in me any time I want; and I believe that it is in my power, were I to do so repeatedly a few times, to take my life within minutes by this means’ (Paul Franks, ‘All or Nothing: Systematicity and Nihilism in Jacobi, Reinhold, and Maimon,’ in: Karl Ameriks (ed), *German Idealism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.95-117, pp.96-97).

<sup>422</sup> See, for example: Beth Lord, *Kant and Spinozism: Transcendental Idealism and Immanence from Jacobi to Deleuze*, Hampshire, Palgrave, 2011, pp.20-40.

<sup>423</sup> Spinoza’s eighteenth proposition in the first part of his *Ethics* would appear to support Jacobi’s first contention: ‘God is the immanent, and not the transitive cause of all things...all things which are, are in God and must be conceived through him, and therefore he is the cause of the things which are in himself...outside God there can be no substance’ (Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics* (trans: W.H. White), London, Wordsworth, 2001, p.21). By ‘rational’ he probably means that proposition eighteen rules out the possibility of a *hypostatic* God.

<sup>424</sup> Again, this point seems to accord with Spinoza’s actual position, especially when read in light of proposition fifteen in the first part of the *Ethics*: ‘whatever is, is in God, and nothing can either be or be conceived without God...Besides God there is no substance, nor can any be conceived ...But modes can neither be nor be conceived without substance; therefore in the divine nature only can they be, and through it alone can they be conceived’ (Ibid, p.14).

creation, then it would be conditioned by nothingness, and would not have a sufficient reason. The first cause could not be rational, because rationality involves at the very least, self-relation, and this relational quality would require a further explanatory reason. All that is left to assert is that all of reality must comprise one all-encompassing monistic system.<sup>425</sup> That is a brief summary of the foundation of Jacobi's critique of the type of rationalism that culminates in Spinoza. And according to Jacobi, this initial monistic turn requires atheism (rejection of a *hypostatic* God),<sup>426</sup> fatalism (everything is part of one fundamental necessary process)<sup>427</sup> and, ultimately, nihilism (because reality is explained tautologically by the fact of reality itself; which means that it is not explained at all).

Jacobi's alternative to this process was, what he called, a *salto mortale* to faith.<sup>428</sup> He believed it was the only way of escaping the principle of sufficient reason. For, within itself, its conclusions are irrefutable, because they are rationally correct according to its own logic. And, if Jacobi were to engage with it on its own ground he would simply be perpetuating the enterprise.<sup>429</sup> He realised that he could undermine the whole process by a realism that was founded on a faith in God, the world, and freedom. By exhibiting faith, Jacobi could seemingly refuse the need or desire for the very thing that the principle promised – conclusive certainty through rational explanation.<sup>430</sup> Although, in reality, Jacobi's *salto* was not the saintly leap that one may first take it to be; after all, he maintained that our whole capacity to reason was in fact underpinned by a similar act of trust: 'we are all born in the faith, and we must remain in the

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<sup>425</sup> Paul Franks, 'All or Nothing: Systematicity and Nihilism in Jacobi, Reinhold, and Maimon', in *German Idealism*, Karl Ameriks (ed), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.95-117, pp.97-98.

<sup>426</sup> See Spinoza's *Scholium* to proposition fifteen in the first part of his *Ethics*.

<sup>427</sup> See especially: Spinoza's thirty-second and thirty-third propositions in part one of the *Ethics*.

<sup>428</sup> Franks, *All or Nothing*, pp.95-117, p.99.

<sup>429</sup> This position seems to be the critique that is at the very centre of Milbank's concerns in *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*.

<sup>430</sup> Jacobi's rejection of the specific form of rationalism that was circulating around his contemporaries, led to some rather scathing reports and condemnations in the typical 'enlightenment championing' history of ideas books. Heinrich Heine offers a portrait of Jacobi as a 'quarrelsome sneak, who disguised himself in the cloak of philosophy' (Heinrich Heine, 'Concerning the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany,' in Heinrich Heine, *The Romantic School and Other Essays*, Jost Hermand and Robert Holub (eds), New York, Continuum, 1985, p.181). However, such reports were only mirroring statements made by some of Jacobi's contemporaries. Moses Mendelssohn claims that Jacobi's alternative in faith was in fact oppressive and counter-productive. Mendelssohn believed that Jacobi's appeal to faith and distrust of rationalism, was a direct effect of his Christian faith which incorporated an acknowledgement of original sin that required redemption through grace, without which humanity was almost destined to fail in all reasonable inquiry. (Micah Gottlieb, *Faith and Freedom: Moses Mendelssohn's Theological-Political Thought*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, p.108).

faith, just as we are all born in society, and must remain in society.’<sup>431</sup> He eccentrically attempted to appeal to David Hume’s (1711-1776)<sup>432</sup> scepticism of causality and *a priori* reasoning to support his claim that we require, fundamentally, faith or a ‘sentiment of belief’ in our senses to avoid a sort of paralysing scepticism;<sup>433</sup> in Jacobi’s own words: ‘without faith, we cannot cross the threshold, sit at a table, or go to bed.’<sup>434</sup> Further points that would dampen the radicality of Jacobi’s faith were that, this belief itself provided something like philosophical ‘immediate certainty,’<sup>435</sup> which he opposed to rational derivative certainty produced through explanation. Faith, according to Jacobi, paradoxically provides a certainty of sort that ‘excludes all proofs absolutely’<sup>436</sup> by ‘the representation itself agreeing with the thing being represented.’<sup>437</sup> His association of faith with an immediate certainty, and indeed his contention that reason itself *a priori* requires an immediate certainty, will prove hugely influential over the post-Kantian idealists for which this will henceforth become the necessary requirement for any first principle, if it is to succeed in being just that. Nevertheless, Jacobi had hoped that by demonstrating that reason itself depended on faith, faith in God, freedom, and the world, would be much more palatable to the rationalists.

Jacobi’s open condemnation of rationalism would prompt a series of open essays entitled ‘*letters on the Kantian philosophy*’ (1786-7) by K.L. Reinhold. Although initially Reinhold had been fairly critical of Kant’s philosophy,<sup>438</sup> he would soon embrace Kantian thought with great enthusiasm, which apparently ‘exhibited all the earmarks of a conversion.’<sup>439</sup> Reinhold’s primary

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<sup>431</sup> F.H. Jacobi, ‘Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn’, in George di Giovanni (trans/ed), *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi: The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, London, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009, p.230.

<sup>432</sup> Jacobi will later utilise Hume in an attempt to unsettle the pretensions of Kant’s first critique that he has overcome scepticism and provided a certainty in reasoning that is detached from faith.

<sup>433</sup> See: F.H. Jacobi, ‘David Hume on Faith or Idealism and Realism’ in in George di Giovanni (trans/ed), *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, London, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009, pp.253-330.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid, p.272.

<sup>435</sup> Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, p.230.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

<sup>438</sup> See: George di Giovanni, ‘The Facts of Consciousness’, in George Di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (eds), *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, Cambridge, Hackett, 2000, pp.2-51, p.9.

<sup>439</sup> See: Ibid. Reinhold’s character appeared to be very susceptible to constant fluctuations in opinions, which can be seen from his own turbulent history converting to Protestantism from Roman Catholicism and periodically feeling atheistic, with a whole host of philosophical conversions somewhere in between. Hegel ridicules Reinhold for his restless temperament: ‘as for Reinhold’s own philosophy, he gives a public history of it to the effect that in the transmigrations of his philosophical soul he first wandered into Kant’s philosophy, and after laying that aside, into Fichte’s; from there into Jacobi’s...’ [Hegel’s list continues] (G.W.F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte’s and*

concern for writing the letters was to prove the compatibility of Kantian rationalism with religious faith. It was in fact these letters that earned him the chair of philosophy at Jena, and contributed to the sudden popularity of Kant's philosophy;<sup>440</sup> J.W. Goethe (1749-1832) would claim that it was like 'an explosion' and Hegel 'a thunderbolt out of the blue'.<sup>441</sup> Kant would later thank him for this advertisement in a private letter lauding Reinhold's 'thoroughness and charm [which are] matchless'.<sup>442</sup> He even claims that, at this stage, Reinhold's ideas 'agree precisely' with his own.<sup>443</sup>

The most important arguments to have emerged from these letters, in respect to our concerns, were that according to Reinhold, Kantian philosophy was already immune to Jacobi's critiques. He argues, quite simply, that the Kantian system demonstrates that practical reason already demands *faith* in God. This simple point emphasises that Kantianism cannot be compatible with the type of atheism that Jacobi believed rationalism would lead to, and that it 'proves' - practically of course - that faith *is* reasonable. Therefore, according to Reinhold, within Kant's philosophy 'reason ceases to be presumptuous and faith ceases to be blind, and instead of opposing one another...they mutually support one another in perpetual harmony'.<sup>444</sup> Reinhold is suggesting that Kant's position is, as it were, a *via media* between rationalism and faith. Furthermore, he argues that practical reason demands faith only in so far as the limitations of pure reason are sufficiently recognised; namely, when the phenomena/noumena distinction is upheld – as Reinhold notes: 'Both [rationalism and fideism] now meet on the line that has become visible marking the limits beyond which knowledge may not proceed and the boundaries from within which faith may not remove itself'.<sup>445</sup> As already noted, Reinhold's purpose for authoring the letters was to demonstrate that Kant's philosophy was compatible with faith. However, he also wanted to demonstrate to Jacobi that Kant's 'philosophical faith' was to be

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*Schelling's system of Philosophy* (trans: Harris and Cerf), New York, State University of New York Press, 1977, p.178-9).

<sup>440</sup> See: George di Giovanni, 'The Facts of Consciousness', in George Di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (eds), *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, Cambridge, Hackett, 2000, pp.2-51, p.9.

<sup>441</sup> Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1993, p.46.

<sup>442</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Correspondence* (trans: Arnulf Zweig), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.271.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid.

<sup>444</sup> K.L. Reinhold, 'Second Letter: The result of Kantian Philosophy on the question of God's existence', in Karl Ameriks and James Hebbeler (eds), *Reinhold: Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp.18-28, p.22.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

distinguished from his ‘theological or historical faith’; a point which Jacobi had initially missed when he unwittingly appealed to Kant to support him in his critique of rationalism.<sup>446</sup>

Despite the enormous popularity of the *Letters*, their success would be short lived, as Jacobi had already started to pick flaws in the phenomena/noumena divide which Reinhold’s position depended upon; critiques which would prompt a radical shift in Reinhold’s own philosophy and indeed in all post-Kantian speculation.

### **The Initial Reception of Kantian Philosophy: Jacobi and the Critique of Transcendental Idealism.**

Jacobi quickly turned his attention to demonstrating that Kantian transcendentalism is itself ‘nihilistic’ and incoherent. Having argued this point, he then attempted to persuade his readers that the only rational conclusion to Kant’s dualisms is in fact Spinozism; which he will conflate together with Kantianism with the effect of demonstrating that all rationalism ultimately leads to monism and thus atheism, fatalism and nihilism. There is some debate concerning the accuracy of Jacobi’s reading of Kant, and especially his reading of Kant through Spinoza,<sup>447</sup> but as noted before, the ‘correctness’ of Jacobi’s reading is not essential when analysing the effects of *his specific* reading for post-Kantian philosophy which, for better or for worse, would be the context in which the post-Kantians engaged with Kantian philosophy.

Jacobi reads Spinoza’s contrast between the two perspectives of the one substance’s perception of itself in its infinite and finite modes as being synonymous with Kant’s phenomena/noumena distinction. This would therefore imply that the Kantian appearances were merely modes of one immanent all-encompassing noumenal realm. Jacobi is led to this conclusion by his contention that Kant needs to hold a Spinozist conception of divinity/first cause in order to provide a coherent and convincing solution to his *third antinomy*; fundamentally, by providing an answer to reason’s need to reconcile an unconditioned self-determining first cause with a series of conditioned and necessitated causes. He argues that if

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<sup>446</sup> He wrongly assumed that Kant’s rejection of the ‘rational’ ontological, cosmological and physico-theological proofs for God meant that he would be sympathetic to Jacobi’s own position, needless to say he was not, a fact that Jacobi had to come to terms with after the publication of Kant’s ‘what does it mean to orient oneself in thinking.’ See: Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (trans: Allen Wood and George di Giovanni), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp.1-15.

<sup>447</sup> See, for instance: Franks, *All or Nothing*, pp.84-145.

Kant's position requires the affirmation of both, the reality of natural determinism and an unconditional first cause of the cosmos, then the first cause must be immanent to the phenomenal realm.<sup>448</sup> He suggests that Spinoza is grappling with this exact issue, but as already noted by Jacobi, the rational solution to this dilemma is only possible by an appeal to an *immanent first cause*. Within Kant's epistemic strictures it is impossible to posit an unconditioned first cause that would be somehow detectable within the series of natural contingent causes, as if it were detectable, it would simply be just another contingent cause. Thus, the first cause, to save its transcendence, must be undetectable within the finite causal series. Obviously, within Spinoza's system this in itself would already be unreasonable, because the transcendent cause would be creator *ex nihilo*, and thus freely determining, which contradicts the principle of sufficient reason. But even more worryingly for Jacobi, Kant's priority of epistemology over ontology means that that which is *to be* can only *be* in so far as it exists as a possible experience for knowledge. Therefore, the first cause, if it is truly transcendent (in the Kantian sense) must 'be' *nothing*. Thus, Jacobi argues that Kant's whole philosophy rests, quite literally, on nothingness and so Kantianism is nihilistic.<sup>449</sup> Hence, Jacobi's famous critique of transcendental idealism: 'without that presupposition [existence of noumena] I could not enter into the system, but with it I could not stay within it.'<sup>450</sup> The only way Kant can salvage the rational coherency of his

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<sup>448</sup> Lord, *Kant and Spinozism*, p.31.

<sup>449</sup> However, this is precisely the problem, Kant cannot insist on the reality of external things as causes of their forms in us; if he could insist on it, then his whole system would collapse as it would mean he could know things-in-themselves and get outside of the limitations of finite reason.

<sup>450</sup> F.H. Jacobi 'supplement: On Transcendental Idealism', In George di Giovanni (trans/ed), *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, London, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009, pp.31-38, p.36. The charge of nihilism seems to have spawned from Jacobi's basic realist objection to Kant's transcendental idealism. Put simply, Jacobi denies the coherency of Kant's contention that 'the transcendental idealist is...an empirical realist' (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A371 = B417, p.344). Kant argues that empirical idealism necessarily occurs in the wake of transcendental realism and the only way to overcome empirical idealism (Kant has a caricature of Berkley's idealism in mind here) is to become a transcendental idealist, who apparently cannot doubt the reality of appearances, simply because they are always accompanied by a sense of passivity within the intuiting and understanding subject; in other words, we are conscious that appearances are caused by something other than our will, although we cannot know anything about these causes we can at least posit them as the causes of our appearances. Nevertheless, Jacobi will still argue that a sense of passivity does not necessarily entail a need in positing the existence of things-in-themselves, Fichte will offer an alternative solution to account for the feeling of necessity in relation to the manifestation of appearances which incorporates an element of finite determinability, and the very fact that he is able to do this shows the arbitrariness involved in speculating about the existence of the noumenal realm. *All* of our appearances are fundamentally occurrences within human sensibility and understanding and it is impossible to know that they are anything other than that, in fact they cannot be anything other than that, because outside possible experiences nothing can *be* in the true sense of the word. Thus, Kant appears to appeal to something that cannot be as the object that causes representations within finite intellects. And if they do really exist, then Kant must concede transcendental idealism all together and become a transcendental realist, as he would implicitly be claiming that he had the cognitive capacities to intuit and understand the noumenal realm which would

arguments, and outwit the charge of nihilism is, according to Jacobi, to adopt an immanent first cause. It must be noted that these critiques are not based on a literal reading of Kant; to the ‘letter’ Kant could not be read in this light. However, this is not Jacobi’s concern, for him, Kant’s philosophy is incomplete to the ‘letter’ and requires Spinozism as its logical culmination, as Lord notes: ‘Jacobi knows that Kant does not believe that God is an immanent cause. But he thinks Kant *ought to believe it*.’<sup>451</sup>

Therefore, Jacobi is arguing that the only real difference between Kant’s transcendental idealism and Spinoza’s monism is that Spinoza acknowledges the necessity and then affirms the

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immediately reduce the noumenal to the phenomenal. Therefore, Jacobi claims that the only logical conclusion implies that ‘the transcendental idealist must have courage...to assert the strongest idealism that was ever professed’ (Jacobi ‘supplement: On Transcendental Idealism,’ pp.31-38, p.338); even if, for Jacobi, all idealism is ultimately nihilistic because it presupposes that ‘objective’ reality is nothing but mere figments of the imagination. These critiques seem somewhat justified and it is not simply a case of Jacobi confusing transcendental idealism with empirical idealism, as if he were unable to distinguish the two, but, rather, Jacobi deliberately arguing that transcendental idealism must ultimately turn into empirical idealism, because the former is not rationally sustainable. Tom Rockmore has recently argued that Kant holds two incompatible versions of the ‘thing-in-itself’ simultaneously in the first critique, what he calls ‘representationalism’ and ‘constructivism’; the former posits the noumena as mediated ‘unknown’ causes of sensations, while the latter maintains that there is no knowledge of mind-independent objects whatsoever, to the extent that it would be impossible to posit causes ‘outside’ of the finite cognitive process. Although, it would evidently be impossible to suggest that Jacobi is intentionally arguing the same point as Rockmore, in light of his arguments it is possible to note that the source of Jacobi’s critiques may come from this latent tension in Kantian thought. Jacobi is fundamentally refusing to grant Kant the possibility of positing ‘things-in-themselves’ as causes of phenomena given Kant’s second model of the noumena (Tom Rockmore, ‘Fichte, German Idealism, and the Thing in Itself’, in ‘Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (eds) *Fichte, German Idealism, and Early Romanticism*, New York, Rodopi, 2010, pp.9-21, see pp.12-15). There are indications that Kant must have been aware of these problems himself, since he sporadically, yet often emphatically, tries to deny his empirical idealism and dress his transcendental idealism in realist rhetoric. Accusations of idealism even rouse him to frustration in the second critique, where he states: ‘if one said, N is an idealist. For although he not only admits, but even insists, that our ideas of external things have actual objects of external things corresponding to them, yet he holds that the form of the intuition does not depend on them but on the human mind [N is clearly Kant himself]’ (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.14). However, this is precisely the problem; Kant cannot insist on the reality of external things as causes of their forms in us; if he could insist on it, then his whole system would collapse as it would mean he could know things-in-themselves and get outside of the limitations of finite reason.

<sup>451</sup> Lord, *Kant and Spinozism*, p.34 (my emphasis). Jacobi had already tried to show that Kant’s transcendental aesthetic already implicitly implied the immanent ontology that he was accusing him of holding. He suggests, in a footnote in the supplement on transcendental idealism, that like Spinozism, the transcendental aesthetic argues that time and space are just confused perceptions of an infinite whole (Ibid, p.37). This led to some confusion amongst Jacobi’s contemporaries as on the surface there seems to be no connection between Spinozism and transcendental aestheticism at all. However, Lord argues that Jacobi’s critique is not the result of him confusing the transcendental idea of space and time with an *omnitude realitatis*, as Franks and Beiser have argued (see: Franks, *All or Nothing*, p.91-92. And Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1993, pp.54-55), but, rather, Jacobi’s attempt to further emphasise the nihilistic base of Kant’s philosophy. Lord suggests that Jacobi knows that Kant’s space and time are ideal. But this is precisely the point, Spinoza’s substance is not; which makes Spinoza’s position rational and real, where Kant’s ideal space and time lack all reality, they are the ‘appearances and limitations of finite wholes that are themselves nonbeings’ (Lord, *Kant and Spinozism*, p.40).

reality of this immanentist ontology, where Kant does not, albeit because of his epistemic restrictions. However, the implications of Kant's failure to acknowledge this reality means that Kant's proposals are ultimately, after all, like Jacobi's - 'irrational' and grounded on faith or, alternatively, they are groundless without faith and therefore nihilistic; or finally, they are rationally coherent and therefore Spinozistic.<sup>452</sup> Jacobi's either/or absolutism is enormously significant for the post-Kantians,<sup>453</sup> for it puts them in a compromising position; they either adopt Jacobi's position, embrace nihilism, or try to reform Kant's philosophy by casting it into the monistic mould that Jacobi believes it requires.

The influence of Jacobi's philosophy for the monistic turn cannot be emphasised enough. There is something deeply ironic about this conclusion, which perhaps challenges some of the 'romantic' contemporary readings of Jacobi as a proto-Radical Orthodox theologian, heroically fighting the rise of secular reason.<sup>454</sup> Of course, one could not doubt his intentions, which were to 'prove' the necessity of faith, but historically, there can be little doubt that it was Jacobi who accelerated the exact thing that he tried so desperately to avoid.<sup>455</sup> Firstly, he makes Spinozism credible; in fact, he makes it extremely popular: 'nearly all the major figures...became Spinoza enthusiasts in the wake of the controversy. Apparently overnight, Spinoza's reputation went from a devil into a saint.'<sup>456</sup> Secondly, he hints at the rational solution needed to dissolve the tensions that *he* had initially exposed in Kantian philosophy; namely, the need for an immediately certain monistic first cause or principle. However, having demonstrated that, within the rationalist model, immediate certainty could only be provided by Spinozism, Jacobi wrongly assumed that - like he had done on reaching this conclusion - his contemporaries would reject it and opt for the immediate certainty of faith. Unfortunately for Jacobi, the sheer velocity that enlightenment thinking was gaining would prove to be too strong for an 'enthusiastic' appeal to faith. They chose to attempt to 'complete' Kant's system with the rational alternative that Jacobi had already provided them with: the monistic and ultimately pan/atheistic system. In the wake of Jacobi, the

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<sup>452</sup> For an assessment of Kant's responses to these critiques see: Lord, *Kant and Spinozism*, pp.41-55.

<sup>453</sup> Even postmodern interpreters of Kant such as Giles Deleuze would come to view Kant through Jacobi's lens. See especially: Giles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, London, Continuum, 2001.

<sup>454</sup> See especially: John Milbank, 'Knowledge: The Theological critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi,' in John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (eds), *Radical Orthodoxy: a New Theology*, London, Routledge, 1999, pp.21-38.

<sup>455</sup> Dieter Henrich supports this reading of Jacobi's historical significance. See: Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, London, Harvard, 2008, p.113.

<sup>456</sup> Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, p.44.



post-Kantians now firmly believed that Kant's system must account for some new monistic requirements. These effects could be seen almost instantaneously in the later work of Reinhold, which clearly attempted to respond to Jacobi's call for the Kantian philosophy to be rationally completed.

### **German Philosophy in the Wake of Jacobi: Reinhold's Monistic Attempt to Complete the Kantian Enterprise.**

In response to Jacobi's arguments, Reinhold produced his new philosophy, which would come to be known as the *Elementar-Philosophie*. Underpinning his new philosophical outlook was his belief that truth was universal and unconditional and that philosophy was slowly progressing towards obtaining this truth. According to Reinhold, the mark of this absolute truth is its 'universally binding' nature; its sheer irrefutability and power in commanding total assent. Of course, for this to be possible, Reinhold believed philosophy needed to provide an *incontrovertible foundation* that, as of yet, had not been supplied. Karl Ameriks notes that Reinhold was in fact attempting to reformulate Kantian philosophy so that it fits the 'radical Cartesian ideal.'<sup>457</sup> He had hoped that this would be achieved and controlled by elite intellectuals operating in secret societies like the freemasons and the illuminate, both of which, Reinhold was an active member of.<sup>458</sup> Despite the fact that it had not yet been realised, he maintained that each generation of philosophers had edged slightly closer to reaching this target. Reinhold points to Leibniz and John Locke (1632-1704) as particular exemplars in advancing towards this universal goal of philosophy.<sup>459</sup> However, the fundamental flaw in both thinkers was, according to Reinhold, the weakness of the philosophical foundation which they had appealed to: the principle of non-contradiction. For Reinhold, the principle of non-contradiction

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<sup>457</sup> Karl Ameriks, 'The Practical Foundation of Philosophy in Kant, Fichte, and After', in Sally Sedgwick (ed), *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.109-129, p.111.

<sup>458</sup>Franks, *All or Nothing*, p.212. Karl Ameriks has noted that Reinhold's elitism was a product of his mature thought and that initially he had hoped to present a philosophy that was immediately accessible to the non-academic public (Karl Ameriks, *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.96-102). However, by the time of the *Elementar-Philosophie*, Ameriks is clear that there is considerable evidence that suggests that 'Reinhold's writing efforts were very much intertwined with activities connected with the far-flung political cells of the secret society...of the Bavarian Illuminati' (Ibid, p.115).

<sup>459</sup>See: K.L. Reinhold, *Ueber das Fundament des Philosophischen Wissens*, Jena, Mauke, 1791, p.63; K.L. Reinhold, 'The Foundation of Philosophical Knowledge', in George Di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (eds), *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, Cambridge, Hackett, 2000, pp.51-104, p.56.

could only provide a foundation for logic but *not philosophy*; as it could only account for the *possibility* of truth which does not necessarily imply the *reality* of truth. For instance, it may be impossible to think of things like squared circles within the principle, but it is in no position to rule out a belief in red polar bears; hence the possibility of a logically true statement does not necessarily imply its reality. Although, he does emphasise that any other foundation for philosophy could not by pass the principle of non-contradiction, but must incorporate its form and provide it with reality or content. The fragility of the foundation of Locke's and Leibniz's systems was exposed by Hume's insistence that representations are nothing but impressions.<sup>460</sup> He maintains that Humean scepticism demonstrates that the principle of non-contradiction is based on an unfounded assumption when appealing to its validity as a foundation of knowledge; as 'the principle of [non-]contradiction can demonstrate the necessity and universality of a judgement, only if in passing the judgement we *assume* the reality of its subject – the very thing which was to be inferred through the judgement.'<sup>461</sup> Reinhold concludes that Hume leaves philosophy in a sorry state; it is a 'philosophy that destroys all philosophy.'<sup>462</sup> He applauds various attempts made by philosophers to combat the Humean challenges, especially the 'common sense' riposte levelled by philosophers such as Thomas Reid (1710-1796) although, they show no real promise in providing the absolute foundation for philosophy that Reinhold is after, as it simply implies that 'popularity passes as the criterion for truth.'<sup>463</sup> The most promising breakthrough to occur in philosophy's advance towards the 'absolute foundation' was irrefutably Kant, according to Reinhold. Undoubtedly, prior to Jacobi, he would have most likely conceded that Kant, whom he had earlier lauded as 'the second Immanuel',<sup>464</sup> had indeed provided this secure foundation; however, after Jacobi, and the fact that Kant's system had not commanded universal assent, Reinhold could only accredit him with providing the foundation for metaphysics or objects of experience, it could not provide a foundation 'to ground the whole of philosophical knowledge';<sup>465</sup> as he 'did not provide a foundation for science whose objects are beyond all experience...on the contrary he expressly showed that no such foundation is

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<sup>460</sup> K.L. Reinhold, *Ueber das Fundament des Philosophischen Wissens*, Jena, Mauke, 1791, p.45.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid, p.58.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid, p.61.

<sup>464</sup> Daniel Breazeale, 'Reason's Changing Needs: From Kant to Reinhold', in George Di Giovanni, *Karl Leonhard Reinhold and the Enlightenment*, New York, Springer, 2010, pp.89-113, p.90.

<sup>465</sup> K.L. Reinhold, 'The Foundation of Philosophical Knowledge,' pp.51-104, p.64.

possible,<sup>466</sup> clearly a problematic gap considering it was precisely this point that had caused Jacobi and others' lack of assent to the Kantian system. Thus, if Kantianism is to be 'completed' it must account, not just for the foundation of objects of possible experience, but for the foundation of all philosophy. In a sentence, Kant's 'is the science of empirical nature in as much as this can be known *a priori*; the other [a philosophy which would be universally binding] would be the science of the empirical faculty of cognition.'<sup>467</sup> According to Reinhold, 'thing' oriented philosophy directed at objects, was simply not in a position to provide an absolute first principle, as the act of cognition itself is prior to any object. Cognition, following Kant, is comprised of understanding and sensibility. And due to the presence of a pure reason, he contends that we must also uphold a pure faculty of cognition. Once taken together, they all imply the *entire faculty of cognition*. However, cognition itself, although an advance on an object orientated investigation, is still not the first principle, as cognition requires *circumstances that make it possible*. Reinhold argues that all cognition requires the act of *representation*; before anything else, we must be able to represent ourselves to ourselves before the processes of cognition can begin. Hence, Reinhold believes *representation* is the first principle of philosophy. Therefore, in order to provide a foundation for the entire faculty of cognition he would need to supply a 'science of the *a priori* form of representing through sensibility, understanding and reason'<sup>468</sup> which in itself would be the science of the entire faculty of representation, which taken with the entire faculty of cognition, gives us Reinhold's '*Elementar-Philosophie*,' which he believes is in the position to provide an absolute, universally binding, first foundation for philosophy.

It is quite clear that in Jacobi's wake, Reinhold is trying to insert measures into the Kantian system, such as a first principle - immediately certain and irrefutable – which is prior to all objects of consciousness and focuses on what consciousness is itself. Reinhold's shift from describing the possibility of the objects of consciousness to describing consciousness as an act, has sometimes earned him the title of the 'father of modern phenomenology.'<sup>469</sup> Why does Reinhold believe that by focusing on the foundation of consciousness rather than its objects he is able to provide the absolute foundation for philosophy?

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<sup>466</sup> Ibid, p.66.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid, p.67.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid.

<sup>469</sup> Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, p.228.

The central thesis of Reinhold's suggestions attempts to 'complete' Kant by answering Jacobi's demands for an un-derived immediately certain first principle which is grounded in itself and not in faith. He attempts to provide this foundation by establishing the means of representing, which he does through his 'principle of consciousness;' it is worth quoting him at length as he describes this principle:

The concept of representation...[must be] determined – independently of all philosophising, for the latter depends on this original determinateness for its correctness – the concept of representation can only be drawn from the consciousness of an actual fact [*Tatsache*]. This fact alone, *qua fact*, must ground the foundation of the *Elementar-Philosophie* – for otherwise the foundation cannot rest...it is not through any inference of reason that we know that in consciousness *representation is distinguished through the subject from both object and subject and is referred to both*, but through simple reflection upon the actual fact of consciousness...[Thus, it is able] to yield the last possible foundation for all explanation precisely because, *qua fact*, it admits of no explanation but is self-explanatory.<sup>470</sup>

The principle of consciousness therefore reveals to us the very fact of representation; when a representation is made it is distinguished within the act of the subject from both, the object and the subject whilst remaining related to both simultaneously.<sup>471</sup> Reinhold initially believes that this is an incontestable 'fact of consciousness' a characteristic requirement for the very possibility of consciousness itself; as Beiser notes: 'it is from this fundamental principle alone, Reinhold believed, that it is possible to establish the systematic unity of the critical philosophy. This principle provides the single root for all Kant's separate faculties...which now turn out to be so many forms of representation.'<sup>472</sup>

Now that Reinhold has his 'first principle,' he begins analysing the process of representation on which it is based. He makes a key distinction within the process of representing itself. The first is what he calls the 'material' of a representation, by which he means 'that component of representation that makes it something given,'<sup>473</sup> where there is an element of passivity within

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<sup>470</sup> L. Reinhold, 'The Foundation of Philosophical Knowledge', in George Di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (eds), *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, Cambridge, Hackett, 2000, pp.51-104, p.70.

<sup>471</sup> Dieter Henrich summarises Reinhold's point with useful clarity. See: Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, London, Harvard, 2008, p.131.

<sup>472</sup> Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism 1781-1801*, Cambridge, Harvard, 2008, p.227. On this see also: Karianne Marx, *The Usefulness of the Kantian Philosophy*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2011, p.204.

<sup>473</sup> See: George di Giovanni, 'The Facts of Consciousness', in George Di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (eds), *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, Cambridge, Hackett, 2000, pp.2-51, p.14.

the subject. The ‘provider’ of the material of representation, that which makes it something given, is the ‘in-itself’, the idea of which only occurs in the very act where the ‘material’ is being ascribed to the ‘in-itself’ as cause *of* the material. For Giovanni, this act of ‘ascribing’ already posits Reinhold’s second distinguished component of representation, which is the ‘*form*’ of the representation. The ‘form’<sup>474</sup> comprises the ‘active’ part played by the subject in representing, the conditions which it spontaneously sets itself when representing the ‘material.’ This dual aspect of representation means that the representation itself can be referred to as a product of the subject, given its ‘control’ over the material’s form but also as something distinct from itself given the element of necessity placed on the subject’s ‘forming’ by the facticity of the material. However, it can also distinguish the representation from the provider of the material as ‘thing in itself’ because of its own activity in creating the representation. Thus, ‘the subject can refer the representation to itself and to the object, yet distinguish it from both at the same time.’<sup>475</sup> However, in order for this distinction to occur successfully, the ‘in-itself’ must be posited; otherwise it would be impossible to uphold ‘within consciousness the distinction between consciousness itself, and what consciousness is about, without which the process of referring and distinguishing required by representation is not possible.’<sup>476</sup> In order to uphold the ‘in-itself,’ he must acknowledge its ‘transcendental’ quality. However, instead of insisting on the incomprehensible nature of the ‘in itself’, like Kant, he now maintains that they are *unrepresentable*. He upholds this as every representation requires the presence of form and material, neither of which can be had for the ‘in-itself,’ it cannot be ‘formed’ because it is extrinsic to form, and there can be no corresponding material for it because it is only posited as the hypothesised ‘provider’ of the material. Reinhold states this explicitly in the ‘*versuch*’: ‘the thing in itself is not representable, so how could it be knowable?’<sup>477</sup> Giovanni argues that here we have some latent tensions if not contradictions in Reinhold’s thesis:

It is granted *ex hypothesi* that the object ‘in-itself’ is not a representation; nor is the subject ‘in-itself’ the product of its own spontaneity. On the other hand, it is also granted *ex hypothesi* that we have in sensation a material which corresponds to the object ‘in-itself’, and to which the subject imparts the form of representation by referring it to its transcendent object. But since

<sup>474</sup> See, for instance: K.L. Reinhold, *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens*, Meiner, 2010, p.125.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid, p.15.

<sup>476</sup> See: Giovanni, ‘The Facts of Consciousness’, p.15.

<sup>477</sup> Karl Ameriks, *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.127.

knowledge occurs by means of representation, it follows on these assumptions that we do have knowledge of the object ‘in-itself’ – though restricted to the limits allowed by the material available in sensation.<sup>478</sup>

In bridging the dualism between understanding and sensibility through representation, and given that all of Kant’s dualisms are mutually conditioned by each other, he has inadvertently bridged the dualism which his system needed to uphold in order to sustain the coherency of the faculty of representation; the distinction between the ‘thing’ and the ‘thing-in-itself.’ He is attempting to argue that ‘sensations are our first *objects* of representation,’<sup>479</sup> and by doing so he faces an exaggerated version of the problem that Kant had created when attempting to formulate the relationship between sensation and understanding. Reinhold does, in fact, inadvertently attempt to solve this contradiction, although seemingly with little success.<sup>480</sup>

Reinhold’s *Elementar-philosophie* has undoubtedly interpreted Kantian thought through Jacobi’s critical lens. It has taken the Kantian project on a new course that has attempted to uphold the Kantian enterprise by providing it with an unquestionable self-explanatory first principle. In his attempt to rectify the ‘gaps’ in the Kantian system, he was forced to produce several monistic modifications of Kant’s philosophy. Put simply, the dualisms have been united in the monistic source that is representation; every cognitive process is a modification of this one first principle. However, in making this modification he was unable to sustain the radical incomprehensibility of the ‘things-in-themselves,’ because within this system they are only unrepresentable, which – as Giovanni pointed out – does not imply that they were incomprehensible as Reinhold had assumed; thereby seemingly undermining his whole system, precisely by upholding his monism.

Thus, in the wake of Reinhold, ‘philosophical interest has been shifted away from the relation between consciousness and the ‘thing-in-itself.’’<sup>481</sup> From these conclusions it can clearly be demonstrated that Reinhold has made a strong attempt to overcome Kantian dualisms by providing the Kantian enterprise with a monistic first principle, which was an absolute, immediately certain *fact*. It is for this reason that Paul Franks states that ‘Reinhold’s influence is

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<sup>478</sup> See: Giovanni, ‘The Facts of Consciousness,’ p.16.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid.

<sup>480</sup> Reinhold attempts to address these issues with his theory of cognition in *Beiträge I*; see: K.L. Reinhold, *Beiträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Missverständnisse der Philosophen*, Meiner, 2004, pp.3-7.

<sup>481</sup> Giovanni, ‘The Facts of Consciousness,’ p.18.

truly massive,<sup>482</sup> to the extent that the major philosophers to emerge after him, namely Fichte and Schelling, are no longer Kantians but Reinholdians, that is until they develop their own unique contributions, which emerge precisely by critically engaging with Reinhold and providing more sophisticated responses to some of the dilemmas which he was addressing. Even though Reinhold himself will later adapt his thought, his later reformulations have little influence.<sup>483</sup> Despite the tensions in Reinhold's philosophy appearing somewhat obvious, it would be the rigorous attack on the *Elementar-Philosophie* by the anonymous reviewer Aenesidemus (after about a year of anonymity, the reviewer was revealed as Gottlob Ernst Schulze (1761-1833) professor of Göttingen), that would cause many to abandon their alliance to Reinhold's system and look for new initiatives to lead the post-Kantian enterprise to the monistic security that they all believed it required.

### **Schulze's Critique of the *Elementar-Philosophie* and the Embryonic Emergence of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*.**

It should be noted that Schulze was not the only 'neo-Humean' to re-introduce sceptical problems back into critical philosophy. Another influential figure was Salomon Maimon (1754-1800), who, like Schulze, was a sceptic who wanted to challenge the foundations of the critical philosophy.<sup>484</sup> His influence on the post-Kantians was notable and his critiques cannot be conflated with those of Schulze's. However, it was specifically Schulze's review of the *Elementar-Philosophie* (1792) that would inspire Fichte's rejection of Reinhold's first principle and encourage him to formulate his own; hence the focus shall primarily be on those specific critiques of Reinhold's first principle that would cause Fichte to abandon it and declare, in a letter to Johann Friedrich Flatt (December 1793), that: 'Aenesidemus...has convinced me of something which I admittedly already suspected: that even after the labours of Kant and

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<sup>482</sup> Franks, *All or Nothing*, p.203.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid, p.237.

<sup>484</sup> For his critique of Kantian transcendental idealism (1790) see: Salomon Maimon, *Essay on Transcendental Philosophy*, London, Continuum, 2010. For his specific critiques of Reinhold see: Salomon Maimon, 'Letters of Philates to Aenesidemus (1794)', in in George Di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (eds), *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, Cambridge, Hackett, 2000, pp.158-203.

Reinhold philosophy is still not a science. Aenesidemus has shaken my own system to its very foundations...I have been forced to *construct a new system*.’<sup>485</sup>

Schulze attempts to demonstrate that Reinhold’s faith in representation as the first principle of philosophy has been misplaced on several levels. Firstly, he argues that the principle of contradiction must logically precede every other principle on the condition that before any statement can be made it must not contradict itself. However, Reinhold has already accounted for this criticism through his distinction between a principle’s ‘form’ and its ‘reality’ or content. Whilst he concedes that every principle’s form must *a priori* conform to the principle of non-contradiction, form itself does not syllogistically imply reality. Thus a first principle would account for both simultaneously and it would therefore be prior to the principle of contradiction. However, Schulze extends his critique to suggest that even in ‘reality’ representation could not be proven to be the first principle, for it is merely a ‘generic concept of representation’<sup>486</sup> from which it would be logically fallacious to deduce the reality of particular representations which are comprised by it. Schulze is here posing a logical objection to Reinhold that is something along the lines of: ‘we cannot infer the truth of the species...from the truth of the genus.’<sup>487</sup>

As we have seen, Reinhold categorically contended that his first principle went beyond ‘object orientated philosophy’ by providing the first principle of consciousness itself. However, Schulze argues that Reinhold’s foundation is no less ‘object’ driven than any other previous philosophy, as it depends on a *phenomenon of experience*, viz. a fact of consciousness. Putting aside Schulze’s Humean sensitivities at this point, which would have undoubtedly had him chomping at the bit in respect to Reinhold’s use of *a priori* reasoning, there are more subtle, yet no less potent, critiques of Reinhold to be drawn out here. As Reinhold chooses to transform *this* particular *experience* (the fact of consciousness) into a universal and necessary absolute postulate, he must *generalise* and *abstract* from this particular empirical experience. According to Schulze, every form of abstraction from a particular experience is marred by an air of

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<sup>485</sup> Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, London, Harvard, 2008, p.147. Robert Pippin claims that the review has been proven to be ‘a major text for anyone interested in this origins question’ (interested, that is, in the inauguration of the distinctly post-Kantian set of issues that were to engage Schelling and Hegel). (Robert Pippin, ‘Fichte’s Alleged Subjective, Psychological, One-Sided Idealism’, in Sally Sedgwick (ed), *The Reception of Kant’s Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.147-171, p.147).

<sup>486</sup> Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, p.274.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid, p.275.



arbitrariness – why not abstract from another one? These criticisms present Reinholdian philosophy with a huge ultimatum: Schulze will permit Reinhold with a possible way out of his critiques by conceding that it is possible that Reinhold is not describing an actual empirical experience with his fact of consciousness but merely describing the possible conditions that are to be in place if the act of representation is to occur. However, if Reinhold concedes this point he must forfeit the whole aim of his philosophy which is to provide a foundation for philosophy in *reality* which surpasses mere possibility, if he were to accept Schulze’s ‘way out’ then, by his own principles, his whole philosophy would have failed; although, if he does not accept it, then Schulze’s penetrating critiques will all but eclipse his system by the fact that there appears to be nothing *necessary* about adhering to this first principle.<sup>488</sup> Schulze appears to have demonstrated that Reinhold’s first principle fails as such and, that furthermore, it cannot – for that reason – be universally binding. These are the fundamental critiques that Schulze directs at Reinhold’s first principle, believing them to be sufficient in exposing the weaknesses of his proposal; although he does produce other logical objections.

Having briefly assessed the most prominent critiques that Schulze presents to the first principle of Reinhold’s *Elementar-Philosophie*, one can now begin to appreciate why any philosopher who shared the overall intentions of Reinhold’s project, especially his emphasis on the direction in which Kantian thought needed to go, would have to drastically rethink pledging allegiances to Reinholdian philosophy. In light of Schulze’s critique, the growing consensus was beginning to become clear: philosophy must continue the Reinholdian project in providing a systematic, immediately certain foundation for philosophy as a *Wissenschaft*, but that this could not be provided by the first principle of the *Elementar-Philosophie*. This contention was pointed out by J.G. Fichte in his potently influential review of Schulze’s work (1794). It has been suggested by Daniel Breazeale that the work itself ‘marks a genuine watershed in the history of German Idealism.’<sup>489</sup> The work is given such an impressive complement because it is the point where Fichte realises that Reinhold is chasing shadows with his first principle, ‘Reinhold had not gone far enough in radicalising Kant’s idealist project, and so had not achieved a self-grounded,

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<sup>488</sup> Ibid, p.276.

<sup>489</sup> Daniel Breazeale, ‘Fichte’s Aenesidemus Review and the Transformation of German Idealism’, in *Review of Metaphysics*, 34:3, PES, 1981, pp.545-568, p.546.

thoroughly systematic philosophy.’<sup>490</sup> It is upon this realisation, and in this very review that we start to get a sample of the new direction that Fichte wants to take post-Kantian thought.

Fichte’s review, the content of which was a product of his 1793 ‘*Eigne Meditationen*,’<sup>491</sup> fluctuates between defending certain aspects of Reinhold’s philosophy against Schulze’s claims, as well as vehemently criticising Reinhold himself, not only agreeing with Schulze on certain points, but also expanding his criticisms. There is no need to offer a complete assessment of the review, it is only necessary to highlight the central points that were to come out of it that would later become instrumental in directing Kantianism into a monistic system.

Firstly, Fichte categorically states that the postulation of the ‘thing-in-itself’ is a dead end and should no longer be pursued by critical philosophy. He appears to advocate this position as he has learnt from Schulze’s critiques of Reinhold that: when attempting to formulate a first principle from within the process of consciousness itself, and not in external objects, it makes very little sense to make it dependent on an external ‘in itself,’ without undermining the principle and lapsing into contradictions as Reinhold did. So from henceforth, idealism will be ‘liberated’ from this ‘dogmatic’ hindrance and there will no longer be an object within consciousness itself that is incomprehensible. For, firstly, Fichte claims, following Jacobi, that it is a logical absurdity; the ‘in-itself’ is, by definition, imperceptible, for it is ‘outside’ sensibility, and it is also inconceivable, as it is extrinsic to the understanding, so we are left with the conclusion: to ‘postulate its existence is to think the unthinkable, and so *ipso facto* destroy its very existence as the unthinkable.’<sup>492</sup> Secondly, and more importantly, Fichte feels emboldened to move towards a deeper form of idealism where he begins to suggest that nothing can ‘be’ if it is ‘apart’ from our process of thinking. When a first principle is to be located within the process of consciousness itself, it makes no sense to try and justify its truthfulness on the basis of correlating it to a pre-existing objective or external reality; it must be the other way around; all reality is to correlate with what is subjectively true. Hence, he proposes that ‘the critical system demonstrates...that the

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<sup>490</sup> Robert Pippin, ‘Fichte’s Alleged Subjective, Psychological, One-Sided Idealism’, in Sally Sedgwick (ed), *The Reception of Kant’s Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.147-171, p.148.

<sup>491</sup> Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, London, Harvard, 2008, p.184.

<sup>492</sup> Beiser, *German Idealism*, p.269.

thought of a thing, which supposedly has existence and certain constitutional characteristics *in itself* and independently of any faculty of representation is a whim, a dream, a non-thought.’<sup>493</sup>

The second significant conclusion to emerge out of the review is that Fichte, continuing to champion the Reinholdian method, insists that the postulation of the ‘thing-in-itself’ only emerges because Kant was not systematic enough and failed to deduce his whole philosophy from one monistic principle; in other words, Kant’s philosophy had not succeeded because it was not a holistic monism. Fichte states this explicitly:

Kant has not traced the pure forms of intuition, space and time, to a *single principle*...After him therefore, the notion did indeed persist of a state of affairs which would be thinkable by some faculty of representation other than the human one, for in Kant the forms of intuition could pass for mere forms of the human faculty of representation...he himself has given a certain authority to this notion through the often repeated distinction between things as they appear to us and things as they are in-themselves – a distinction, however, which was certainly intended to hold only provisionally, and for the general reader.<sup>494</sup>

Thus, Kant’s ‘failure’ is precisely what has allowed scepticism to re-appear in critical philosophy. Monism, in the guise of an absolute self-explanatory first principle, would have, according to Fichte, guarded against this sceptical return once and for all. And this is why Reinhold was right to seek it, in order to complete what Kant had started; in Fichte’s words: ‘Reinhold gained for himself the immortal merit of drawing the attention of philosophical reason to the fact that the whole of philosophy must be traced back to one single principle.’<sup>495</sup> If critical philosophy were to continue to uphold the ‘in-itself’, then scepticism would *always* re-emerge; as the criterion for truth would always rest on the extent to which a subjective truth corresponded to an objective one; corresponded to the ‘thing-in-itself.’ Hence, by removing the noumenal realm, the only criterion for truth would be what was subjectively true; it is true because it is true subjectively; as a parallel to Spinoza, he states: ‘it is plainly the business of critical philosophy to show that...all that arises in our mind is to be completely explained and comprehended by the mind itself...critical philosophy shows us the circle which we cannot overstep, but within it, it provides our entire knowledge with the strictest coherence.’<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>493</sup> J.G. Fichte, ‘Review of Aenesidemus’, in George Di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (eds), *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, Cambridge, Hackett, 2000, pp.136-157, p.147.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid, pp.149-150.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid, p.150.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid, p.146.

Fichte also agrees with Schulze's critique of the principle of consciousness as a mere abstraction from an empirical event, which means Reinhold's first principle falls short of its own demands, namely, to provide truth beyond mere logical possibility and ascertain truth in reality. Hence, Fichte argues that 'the principle of consciousness, which is placed at the apex of the whole of philosophy, is based on empirical self-observation and, as such, it undoubtedly expresses an abstraction.'<sup>497</sup> Fichte believes that Reinhold's failure to provide a first principle that is true in 'reality' is down to his inability to see past his insistence on the first principle expressing or commencing with an actual fact (*Tatsache*); something that is substantially there awaiting discovery. Fichte contends (anticipating the first principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*) that, philosophy does need a 'real' first principle that goes beyond formal logic; however, he argues that this need not be comprised by a fact: 'if I may venture a claim which can be neither explained nor proven here – such a principle does not have to express a fact just as content; it can also express a fact as *performance*.'<sup>498</sup> It is at this point where he begins to experiment with the *Ich*:

The ego in intellectual intuition is because it is, and is what it is, it follows to this extent it is *self-positing*, absolutely self-subsistent and independent. In empirical consciousness...the ego, as intelligence, *is* only with reference to something intelligible, and to this extent it has dependent existence. Now, this ego, which is thereby posited in opposition to itself, constitutes not two, but only one ego; and this is impossible on the required condition, for dependent and independent are contradictory. But since the ego cannot give up its characteristic of absolute self-subsistence, a striving thus arises to make the intelligible dependent on itself and thus bring to unity the ego which represents the intelligible and the self-positing ego. And this is the meaning of the expression, *reason is practical*. In the pure ego, reason is not practical; neither is it practical in the ego as intelligence; it is practical only in so far as it tries to unite the two.<sup>499</sup>

We have, in this one paragraph, several embryonic components of what will become central in Fichte's mature Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*, namely, intellectual intuition and self-positing as activity or fact-act, the pure *Ich* and the empirical *Ich* both comprising one *Ich*; the necessity of reason becoming practical given the infinite striving of the empirical *Ich* to unite itself with the pure ego's infinite activity. Fichte only briefly explores these ideas in the review, only as a hint at where he thinks critical philosophy needs to go in order to be able to provide the first principle that Reinhold failed to lay.

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<sup>497</sup> Ibid, p.141.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid, pp.151-152.

At this point it is important to note that Fichte has radicalised Reinhold's move away from objects of consciousness to consciousness itself, to the extent that the 'in-itself' can longer even be posited as something utterly 'outside' of consciousness; anything that *is*, can only *be* insofar as it is related to our process of consciousness. Therefore, methodologically speaking, philosophy cannot, and should not, attempt to get 'outside' of the subjective realm, which is the only realm that could exist *for us*. This monistic move is precisely how Fichte believes he can overcome the scepticism of Schulze and Maimon; for there is no longer any 'external' reality apart from consciousness that subjective truths need to correlate to. If the weight of the sceptical critique rests on the proposition that we cannot know to what extent a subjective reality corresponds with an objective reality, then Fichte has pulled the foundation from their feet by encapsulating everything within the subjective sphere, where what is true is true because there is nothing else that could suggest that it were untrue.<sup>500</sup> It is fair to say that Fichte has his methodology at this point but not a full account of the first principle itself; this is first produced in his 1794/95 *Wissenschaftslehre* (from now WL) which shall now be evaluated.

### **Fichte and the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre***

In the analysis that follows, it shall be demonstrated that – due to the context in which Fichte received the Kantian philosophy (through Jacobi and Reinhold) – he shall attempt to provide a monistic foundation for the Kantian project. However, by formulating his first principle and elucidating its implications, he will introduce very specific philosophical problems into post-Kantian thought, which we will attempt to demonstrate can be considered to be archaeological

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<sup>500</sup> One is able to determine from this conclusion that Fichte had already anticipated the sceptical critiques of Maimon and already responded to them. Firstly, if one takes Maimon's central thesis that there can be no solution, within Kant's proposals, to the conundrum of the radical disunity between understanding and sensibility, as the source of his instigation of scepticism, then one could note that Fichte agrees with him. It is precisely the discontinuity between understanding and sensibility as noumena and phenomena that invites sceptical ripostes, for how could it ever be possible to tell whether the latter agreed with the former (Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism 1781-1801*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2008, pp.253-54). Fichte does in fact concede these points, and like Maimon, agrees that holistic monism - a unity of understanding and sensibility, noumena and phenomena derived from one common source is the only means of a rationally coherent Kantianism. However, unlike Maimon, he will not concede that scepticism has the final say. He in fact suggests that, within critical philosophy, scepticism can have no reasonable say whatsoever; because if there is only 'subjective truth,' given that all reality must be limited to subjective consciousness, there is no 'outside' that subjective representations must be 'compared' to in order to determine their truth. He argues that Maimon is ironically still upholding a sense of the 'in-itself,' only now it is posited as the domain of 'experience,' to which truth claims must correspond to. According to Fichte, this misses the point of critical philosophy entirely, and when taken in its true form, clearly forbids the suggestion of scepticism. Fichte elaborates on this response to Maimon in: J.G. Fichte, *Science of Knowledge* (trans: Peter Heath and John Lachs), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970, p.100.

shifts or modifications of Valentinian metaphysical presuppositions earlier noted in chapter II, and therefore providing the ‘Valentinian’ framework from within which later philosophers, such as Schelling and Hegel, will operate and construct their concepts.

These philosophical problems are introduced due to the manner in which Fichte transforms Kant’s ‘in itself’ and the relationship between the infinite and the finite; both of which can best be evaluated by focusing on the ‘absolute Ich’ and the *Anstoss* (*check*) in Fichte’s Jena system(s). Since our interest in Fichte only involves his philosophy’s immediate historical outcomes, in so far as it would direct and shape the thought of later post-Kantians within a Valentinian framework,<sup>501</sup> our interpretation will not need to be directed by the vast range of conflicting literature regarding the debate concerning the ‘correct’ interpretation of Fichte’s philosophy.<sup>502</sup> The major concern is to draw out the specific set of philosophical problems that emerge in Fichte’s thought and to demonstrate why they occur.

When commenting on Schelling’s 1795 work ‘*On the I as Principle of Philosophy*’ in a letter to Reinhold (July 1795), Fichte states that ‘Schelling’s entire essay is a commentary on my writings.’<sup>503</sup> However, from around about the appearance of his ‘*System of Transcendental*

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<sup>501</sup> In his 1794 letter to Hoven, Friedrich Schiller writes that he considered Fichte as ‘the greatest speculative genius of the present century’ (Emil Wilm, ‘the Relation of Schiller to Post-Kantian Idealism,’ in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 9:1, 1910, pp.20-24, p.20); although he was always too much of a Kantian to ever be considered a Fichtean. Similarly, Hölderlin was initially immersed in Fichte’s philosophy and attended Fichte’s lectures in Jena 1794. He wrote in mid-November of the same year to his friend Neuffer that ‘Fichte is the soul of Jena’ and he apparently missed all of his other classes in order to satisfy his temporary infatuation with Fichte’s thought. Although like Schiller, he was never fully converted to Fichte’s vision of philosophy (Beiser, *German Idealism*, p.386). Novalis, heavily influenced by Hölderlin, was reaching similar conclusions to his friend in his study of Fichtean philosophy. It is clear, while the above thinkers were not Fichteans in a conventional form of discipleship; their thoughts were born out of engagement and criticism of Fichte. Schelling explicitly acknowledges Fichte as his ‘teacher’ and ‘predecessor’ and even describes his ‘*system of Transcendental Idealism*’ as an ‘exposition of Fichtean idealism’ (F.W.J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy* (trans: Andrew Bowie), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press). H.S. Harris identifies Hegel as a ‘disciple and coadjutor’ of Schelling, although an independent thinker, he would have more than likely followed Schelling’s intellectual development and adopted Fichtean thought (H.S. Harris, ‘Introduction to the Difference Essays’, in G.W.F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s system of Philosophy* (trans: Harris and Cerf), New York, State University of New York Press, 1977, p.3). Friedrich Schlegel like Schelling, and presumably Hegel, conceived of Fichte as the culmination of Kantian thought. He wrote to his brother in 1795 that Fichte was ‘the greatest metaphysical thinker now living’ (Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism 1781-1801*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2008, p.437).

<sup>502</sup> There has been hermeneutical controversy surrounding the WL since its very first publication; controversy that persists even to this day. For a brief summary of some of the interpretations that surround, perhaps, the most debated issue in Fichte’s thought: the absolute I, see: Alexandre Guilherme, ‘Fichte: Kantian or Spinozian? Three Interpretations of the Absolute I’, in *South African Journal of Philosophy*:29:1, pp.1-16).

<sup>503</sup> Daniel Breazeale (ed and trans), *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, London, Cornell University Press, 1993, p.401.

*Idealism*' (1800), there is sufficient evidence to suggest that Schelling was beginning to see his philosophy as an independent project detached from his earlier 'Fichteanism'; although, dissatisfaction for Fichte's philosophy was already circulating from the likes of Hölderlin (as early as 1795), which would have undoubtedly influenced Schelling and Hegel's reception of Fichte. Schelling accuses Fichte publicly of incorporating his own ideas into the WL in 1806,<sup>504</sup> although he had already done this privately in 1801;<sup>505</sup> incidentally, roughly around the same time as Hegel's first acknowledged publication: '*The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*' which explicitly suggests that post-Kantian thought should now move beyond Fichtean philosophy. The fact that Fichte denies Schelling's accusations<sup>506</sup> makes little difference to the conclusions that can be drawn from them: Schelling and his contemporaries had ceased to be Fichteans from the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is, for this reason that the scope of our assessment of Fichte's thought shall not extend beyond, what is typically considered to be, the 'Jena period.'<sup>507</sup>

### **Fichte's 'Three Forms of Positing' as Valentinian Presuppositions.**

Fichte begins his first presentation of the WL by announcing that 'our task is to *discover* the primordial, absolutely unconditioned first principle of all human knowledge. This can be neither proven nor defined, if it is to be an absolutely primary principle.'<sup>508</sup> Fichte's emphasis on the nature of the first principle as something which can neither be proven nor defined is the product of the fact that it is not some 'thing' there, but, rather, it is something done; an act (*Tathandlung*); an act which makes all consciousness possible. Nothing can begin before it, no

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<sup>504</sup> In *Darlegung des Wahren Verhältnisses der Naturphilosophie zu der Verbesserten Fichtesenlehre* (1806). (Steven Hoeltzel, 'Toward or Away from Schelling: on the Thematic Shift in Fichte's Later Philosophy', in Tom Rockmore and Daniel Breazeale (eds), *After Jena: New Essays on Fichte's Later Philosophy*, Chicago, NU, 2008, pp.67-81, p.68).

<sup>505</sup> Steven Hoeltzel, 'Toward or Away from Schelling: on the Thematic Shift in Fichte's Later Philosophy', in Tom Rockmore and Daniel Breazeale (eds), *After Jena: New Essays on Fichte's Later Philosophy*, Chicago, NU, 2008, pp.67-81, p.68.

<sup>506</sup> See: the fourteenth lecture of Fichte's 1804 WL. J.G. Fichte, *The Science of Knowing: J.G. Fichte's 1804 Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre* (trans: Walter Wright), New York, State University of New York Press, 2005, pp.109-110.

<sup>507</sup> Breazeale notes that it was Fichte's 'Jena period' that 'exercised the greatest influence on his contemporaries' (Daniel Breazeale, 'Fichte and Schelling: the Jena Period', in Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins (eds), *The Age of German Idealism*, London, Routledge, 1993, p.147).

<sup>508</sup> J.G. Fichte, *Science of Knowledge* (trans: Peter Heath and John Lachs), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p.93.

proof or definition could be provided prior to it being carried out. Thus, its discovery involves its performance.<sup>509</sup>

Initially, in the 1794/5 WL, Fichte attempts to elucidate this point with a rather intricate logical system. He begins with the basic formula of the law of identity  $A = A$ . According to Fichte, the truth of this formula requires no reflection; it is immediately certain and its truthfulness is not dependent on a secondary proof or further reason. Fichte believes that this formula implies that we can ascribe to ourselves the ‘power of asserting something absolutely’,<sup>510</sup> without ‘reason.’ However, he is keen to point out that the absolute truth of  $A = A$  does not necessarily imply that there is actually an A. It is only true in its logical ‘form,’ it does not answer ontological questions. But what we can say is, that if an A did exist, then it would comply with the absolute truth of  $A = A$ ;<sup>511</sup> primarily being interested in the relationship that exists in  $A = A$ <sup>512</sup> which he names X. He attempts to account for the ontological reality of  $A = A$  by locating the truth of X in the *self* as its ontological ground. Therefore, in the proposition  $A = A$  there is a ‘self’ which judges this formula and acknowledges the absolute truth of X. On this observation, he concludes that if it is the self that judges the formula, and we have already concluded that  $A = A$  is true absolutely without any derived explanation or reason, then the self must be the ground of its truth; we give the law of X to ourselves:

X is at least in the self, and posited by the self, for it is the self that judges in the above proposition, and indeed judges according to X, as a law; which law must therefore be given to the self, and since it is posited absolutely and without any other ground, must be given to the self by itself alone.<sup>513</sup>

However, he concedes that, although we cannot know whether and how the A is posited, based on the abstraction that has concluded that X is in the self - we must also conclude that A is in the self, given that A belongs to the necessary relationship designated by X: ‘A also must be present in the self, insofar as X is related to it.’<sup>514</sup> A in the formula  $A = A$  is both subject and predicate related by X, both of which must be located in the self on the basis of his prior deductions. Fichte

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<sup>509</sup> Daniel Breazeale, ‘Inference, Intuition, and Imagination: on the Methodology and Method of the First Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*, in Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (eds), *Essays in Fichte’s Foundation of the Entire Doctrine of Scientific Knowledge*, New York, Prometheus, 2001, p.22.

<sup>510</sup> Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, p.94.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid.

<sup>512</sup> Ibid, p.95.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid.



believes that these proposals prove the ontological reality of  $A = A$  since they have been located within the self.

He then argues that  $A$  exists on the basis that, by  $X$ , the self asserts that  $A$  does exist for the self. Hence, within the self there is  $A = A$ , by the law of  $X$ , which is also subject and predicate that is totally united and one and the same within the self. He argues that this conclusion permits him to remove  $A = A$  and the relationship  $X$  is now equivalent to  $I = I$ ;  $I$  am  $I$ , which is a fact of consciousness that can be posited just as absolutely as  $X$  is. Hence, it can be argued, that 'I am  $I$ ' is now in a position to move beyond the limitations of the formula  $A = A$ ; as by itself, it is still strictly a 'formal' proposition; the truth of which is conditioned only by possibility. 'I am  $I$ ' on the other hand, is unconditionally true in form, given that it's related by  $X$  (which has already been proven to be unconditionally true), but it is also absolutely true in content - in reality - as the  $I = I$  is living; it is the self; it is 'I am.' Fichte argues that 'I am' as it stands is simply a 'fact.' For if  $A = A$  is certain (or  $X$ , as the designated relationship, is certain) then 'I am' is also certain. From this we can conclude, that 'it is a fact of empirical consciousness that we are constrained to regard  $X$  as absolutely certain; and so too with the proposition 'I am', on which  $X$  is founded.'<sup>515</sup> Therefore, the 'I am' or the 'fact' that, in the self, the self itself is posited is a necessary requirement for all facts of empirical consciousness (something like the Kantian unity of apperception).

As he noted earlier in his exhaustive process of reasoning,  $A = A$  requires a judgement by the self. Judgement, as Fichte understands it, is an *activity* of the human mind. So we can conclude that  $X = 'I \text{ am}'$  is an activity as well as its own ground. Therefore, 'what is absolutely posited, and founded on itself, is the ground of one particular activity of the human mind.'<sup>516</sup> We are left with the suggestion that the self posits itself *as* its own pure activity. So that 'the self posits itself, and by virtue of this mere self-assertion it exists; and conversely, the self exists and posits its own existence by virtue of merely existing. It is at once the agent and the product of action: the activity, and what the activity brings about; action and deed are one and the same, and hence the 'I am' expresses an act.'<sup>517</sup>

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<sup>515</sup> Ibid. p.96.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid. p.97.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid.

Fichte, turning his attention back to the proposition ‘I am I’, reasons that the ‘first’ I, in the statement ‘I am I,’ is absolutely posited as occupying the place of formal subject; ‘formal subject’ is here meant to mean that the ‘first’ I is the positing I which is active. The ‘second’ I occupies the predicative position and existence is the predicate, it is the ‘reflecting’ I. Although, he has distinguished the two I’s in the proposition ‘I am I,’ his earlier conclusions render this distinction somewhat artificial, as both I’s are utterly identical. He concludes from this process that ‘the self exists because it has posited itself;’<sup>518</sup> because the subjective I and the reflective I are one and the same; subject and existence are one and the same. It should now become clear, according to Fichte, what he means by the word I in this context, which leads to the self as an ‘absolute subject’ which is to say: ‘that whose being or essence consists simply in the fact that it posits itself as existing...it posits itself, so it is; and as it is, so it posits itself.’<sup>519</sup> Hence, it can be concluded that the self exists *for* the self. To posit and ‘to be’ are identical in the self and the ‘self-positing self and the existing self are perfectly identical.’<sup>520</sup> On the basis of the above demonstration, he contends that he has described the act which is consciousness itself; the act which stands at the forefront of his entire WL as its first absolutely unconditioned principle: ‘the self begins by an absolute positing of its own existence.’<sup>521</sup> Therefore, the proposition  $A = A$ , as a logical principle, is in fact founded on the first principle of the WL; all reality is posited through this principle, *through* and *for* the self.<sup>522</sup> As Zoller notes, for Fichte, intellectual intuition presupposes all consciousness and thinking, it is the foundation of all consciousness.<sup>523</sup> However, his first principle cannot stand alone, it initiates a second principle.

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<sup>518</sup> Ibid, p.98.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid, p.99.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid.

<sup>522</sup> In his *Nova Methodo*, Fichte modifies this rather complicated logical introduction into his first principle in favour of the famous ‘intellectual intuition’ (Fichte also offers a clear summary of intellectual intuition in his work on ethics. See: J.G. Fichte, *The System of Ethics* (trans: Daniel Breazeale and Gunter Zoller), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p.50). The first principle remains the same, only now Fichte summons us to grasp it by encouraging us to act the first principle out. He simply states: ‘construct the concept of the I and observe how you accomplish this’ (J.G. Fichte, *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy: Wissenschaftslehre nova method 1796/99* (trans: Daniel Breazeale), London, Cornell University Press, 1992, p.119). He insists that by ‘observing oneself while engaged in this activity, one becomes immediately conscious of it; i.e., one posits oneself as self-positing’ (Ibid).

<sup>523</sup> Gunter Zoller, *Fichte’s Transcendental Philosophy: The Original Duplicity of Intelligence and Will*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.34. Fichte also uses the example of thinking of a particular object such as a wall or desk in order to illustrate his first principle. See: J.G. Fichte, *The System of Ethics* (trans: Daniel Breazeale and Gunter Zoller), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p.24.

Fichte begins the introduction of his second principle by drawing attention to the fact that, just as it was with the first principle, the second principle is not able to be proven or derived. And that, just as he did before with the logical proposition  $A = A$ , he will begin with a ‘fact of consciousness. ‘ $-A$  is not equal to  $A$ ’ is, according to Fichte, as certain, under the same conditions, as  $A = A$ . Thus, he concludes that, in opposition to the first principle, ‘ $-A$  is posited absolutely, as such, just because it is posited.’<sup>524</sup> From this conclusion, Fichte argues that because the proposition ‘ $-A$  is not equal to  $A$ ’ occurs certainly among the facts of empirical consciousness (it is true because it is true), and because it was concluded from the first principle, that the facts of consciousness such as  $A = A$  are true insofar as they are grounded in the activity of the self, we can therefore conclude that this opposition can also be included among the acts of the self. This ‘opposition is, as to its form, an absolutely possible and unconditional act based on no higher ground [than the self].’<sup>525</sup> Fichte can affirm this point as the act of counter-positing, although not contained within or to be derived from, still presupposes the identity of consciousness. Fichte is left with the following propositions: ‘ $A$  (absolutely posited) =  $A$  (the object of reflection). By an absolute act this  $A$ , as object of reflection, is opposed to  $-A$ , and this latter is judged also to be opposed to the absolutely posited  $A$ , since both  $A$ ’s are the same: a likeness based of the positing and reflecting self.’<sup>526</sup> So, by the absolute act the opposite is posited as opposed. Therefore, ‘every opposite, so far as it is so, is so absolutely, by virtue of an act of the self, and for no other reason. Opposition in general is posited absolutely by the self.’<sup>527</sup> However, if an  $-A$  is to be posited, an  $A$  must also be posited; the first proposition is conditioned by the latter. So the act of positing a  $-A$  is conditioned by an act which posits an  $A$ . Fichte uses this point to further emphasise that counter-positing is conditioned by positing; if it was not then it would not be counter-positing at all, but an absolute positing. Having already concluded that counter-positing does occur in the activity of the I, he now proceeds to address the implications of this fact.

He draws a distinction in the  $-A$  between its *form* and its *matter*; the form is determined absolutely by the act of counter-positing, it is an opposite, whereas the matter of the  $-A$  is

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<sup>524</sup> J.G. Fichte, *Science of Knowledge* (trans: Peter Heath and John Lachs), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p.103.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

‘governed by A; it is not what A is, and its whole essence consists in that fact.’<sup>528</sup> Whatever –A is, it can only be known to me ‘on the assumption that I am acquainted with A.’<sup>529</sup> Therefore, when considering Fichte’s definition of A as an I, it can be concluded that the I or self is posited absolutely and any opposition which occurs can only be in opposition to the self and, that which is opposed to the self must be the ‘not-self’ or the *Nicht-Ich*. Given the fact that Fichte has already ‘proven’ that the proposition ‘–A is not equal to A’ is an unconditional fact of consciousness akin to  $A = A$ , he is also able to admit that ‘a not self is opposed absolutely to the self,’<sup>530</sup> which is unconditioned in its ‘form’ but conditioned in its matter by the I. Undoubtedly, the introduction of his second principle produces more contradictions than explanations, which he attempts to address and reconcile with his third principle.

Fichte initially defines his third principle by acknowledging that the first and second principles are mutually exclusive: ‘If  $I = I$ , everything is posited that is posited in the self. But now the second principle is supposed to be posited in the self, and also not to be posited therein. Thus  $I$  does not  $= I$ , but rather self = not-self, and not-self = self.’<sup>531</sup> Based on the laws of reflection, both the first and second principles are absolutely true and Fichte is not willing to relinquish either of them; even if he concedes that if both are correct then ‘the identity of consciousness, the sole absolute foundation of our knowledge, is itself eliminated.’<sup>532</sup> In drawing these conclusions, Fichte has already outlined the task of the third principle: ‘to discover some X, by means of which all these conclusions can be granted as correct, without doing away with the identity of consciousness.’<sup>533</sup> Firstly, the opposites which have been outlined, which are to be unified, both lie in the self (according to the pre-established conclusions). That is to say, both lie in consciousness and X (the relationship which is the unknown solution), must therefore also exist in consciousness,<sup>534</sup> because both are able to exist in the self, which anticipates a pre-established harmony of sort. Both opposites are the product of original acts of the self; consciousness being a product of the self’s first original act. However, the act of counter-positing which results in the not-self, presupposes the first act, or the relationship within the first act which was X. Therefore,

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<sup>528</sup> Ibid, p.104.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid, p.107.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid.

<sup>534</sup> Ibid.

the 'X (harmony between both opposites) itself must be a product, and an original act of the self at that'<sup>535</sup> – it must be so, given the existence of consciousness itself, which presupposes the unity of these two opposites – 'Hence there is an act of the human mind = Y, whose product is X.'<sup>536</sup> Therefore, the form of Y is determined by the necessity to unify the two opposites and posit them together without mutual exclusion: 'the opposites in question must be taken up into the identity of the one consciousness.'<sup>537</sup> Although, we now know what Y must be, we do not know how it can actually be. Fichte's answer to this 'how' is that the Y designates a mutual limitation of each opposite: 'the act of Y will be the limiting of each opposite by the other; and X will denote the limits.'<sup>538</sup> The new definition of X as a marker of the mutually limiting activity of the Y introduces, according to Fichte, the concepts of reality and negation as further opposites which must now be united. He states this because 'limiting' is an act of partially negating the reality of something; which itself must imply that the notion of limitation must also contain the notion of divisibility. Therefore, 'by the act of Y both the self and the not-self are absolutely posited as divisible.'<sup>539</sup> Fichte argues that reality is taken away from the self in so far as the not-self is posited within the self; their mutual reality is divisible. Consciousness now contains the whole of reality, and the not-self is given reality to the extent that it does not belong to the self. Both the self and the not-self are now 'particulars' they are 'finitised' and are to be distinguished from the absolute self, for which the 'not-self is absolutely nothing';<sup>540</sup> contrary to the 'limitable self' where the not-self is a negative quantity. Therefore, the self is set against itself through a concept of alienation: 'consciousness is one: but in this consciousness the absolute self is posited as indivisible (first principle); whereas the self to which the not-self is opposed is posited as divisible. Hence, insofar as there is a not-self opposed to it, the self is in opposition to the absolute self.'<sup>541</sup> Despite these propositions existing within consciousness, Fichte contends – based on his third principle – that the 'opposing' self and not-self were successfully unified through the concept of divisibility. His third principle can be abstracted into a formula which he calls the 'grounding proposition' and can be expressed thus: 'A in part = -A , and vice versa. Every opposite is like its opponent in one respect, = X; and every like is opposed to its like in

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<sup>535</sup> Ibid.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid, p.108.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid.

<sup>540</sup> Ibid, p.109.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

one respect, = X.<sup>542</sup> X designated as the grounding proposition as every conjunction or distinction would need *a priori* to proceed from this formula. Therefore, the formula can be formulated slightly differently as ‘A = –A in respect of X.’<sup>543</sup> Fichte states that his third principle is a ‘lower principle’ because, from within it, the self is ‘degraded’ into divisibility ‘so that it can be set equal to the not-self and in the same concept it is also opposed thereto.’<sup>544</sup> His description of the degradation is as follows: ‘the self and the not-self, as equated and opposed through the concept of their capacity for mutual limitation, are themselves both something (namely accidents) in the self as divisible substance; posited, by the self, as absolute, illimitable subject, to which nothing is either equated or opposed.’<sup>545</sup>

Having evaluated Fichte’s dense and intricate first three principles, we are now in a position to suggest to what extent they introduce the Valentinian philosophical presuppositions and problems that begin to direct the entire shape of Fichte’s philosophical narrative. Firstly, in his first principle, Fichte associates the ‘creation’ of the self, and therefore consciousness, with an ‘original’ infinite activity of the absolute self that is somehow disturbed by a counter activity that is contrary to its own. This process ‘creates’ divisibility in the self and a finite reality that is alienated from its original infinite activity. Given its origin, it is ‘aware’ of what it should be, its true unified self, and therefore desires to overcome its own alienation and be united with its infinite activity. It is precisely at this point where the philosophical problems are introduced. If we do assume that this is our starting point, why is there finitude at all? How has it occurred or what has caused it. Therefore, just as we saw in Valentinian thought, Fichte’s philosophy has a narrative structure committed to an original monism (absolute activity of the I), which is then disrupted or broken up (by the phenomenon of ‘counter-positing’). This disparity should not be the case; it must be reunited so that the original monism can be maintained or so that the divisible self can be identified with its own original infinite activity. Thus, in both instances there is no purposeful or deliberate communication from infinitude to finitude, but rather a primordial ‘fall’ from this state or ‘disruption’ that produces a negative finite reality that must be negated or overcome. Fichte attempts to respond to these problems which his philosophy has introduced.

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<sup>542</sup> Ibid, p.110.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid. Interestingly, Fichte thinks that his third principle has unconditionally proven that *a priori* synthetic judgements are possible, as they exist in the self which *a priori* unites two opposing notions.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid, p.116.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid, p.117.

### **Fichte's 'Response' to his 'Valentinian Philosophical Problems'.**

Although Fichte has attempted to explain the compatibility of the first two principles *via* the third, the question as to *why* and *how* this occurs has largely been left unanswered. In his attempt to respond to these glaring tensions within his own system, he introduces the notion of an *Anstoß* ('check' or 'block') which he hopes will explain the relationship between the three principles. The *Anstoß* is a primal interruption or block of the original infinite activity of the Absolute ego. This check produces the reflecting finite self as distinct from its own infinite activity, which it is now aware of. The finite self comprehends this infinite activity as its own, yet not as its own at the same time, in so far as it cannot be harmoniously united to this activity as the finite self is limited; markedly not infinite. Thus, the type of subjectivity that comprises all of human existence is a product of an original Absolute activity blocked and then reflected upon, without this event, the self as we know it could not exist. The *Anstoß* originates outside of the infinite activity of the Absolute ego, paradoxically functioning as an 'in itself' for this subject. However, it should not be considered as some higher ontological reality to the Absolute ego, for the 'check' does not directly set bounds to the self's activity by dictating what the self must be but, rather, it is the occasion that prompts the self to set its own limits to its own activity; therefore effecting it indirectly through *itself* as it were. The 'check' is fundamentally the 'cause' of the positing of the not-self and the external world. Fichte works out the implications of the 'check' between the divisible or intelligent I and the divisible not-I at some length in his works on natural right and ethics. Within the empirical ego's daily life, the divisible not-self functions as a 'check' in the life of the divisible I and that nature and the external world, although obviously 'real,' are there only in so far as the self is to act; they are the conditions to which the self is called to exercise its own free determinability; the divisible not-self 'summons' the divisible self to freely determine itself by acting on the not-self within the external world. Hence, Fichte will make statements such as: 'our world is absolutely nothing other than the Not-I; it is posited only in order to explain the limitedness of the I, and hence it receives all its determinations only through opposition to the I.'<sup>546</sup> Therefore, the 'check' urges the self to posit beings 'like itself' outside of itself in an external world; Fichte conceives the natural world to contain its ends

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<sup>546</sup> See: J.G. Fichte, *The System of Ethics* (trans: Daniel Breazeale and Gunter Zoller), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p.70.

precisely in the ends of the self; it has, as it were, a purpose in the self and not outside it;<sup>547</sup> it is there simply to be determined by and for the self: ‘a rational being cannot ascribe a power to itself without simultaneously thinking of something outside of itself to which this power is directed.’<sup>548</sup> Therefore, we could say that ‘rights’ designate the possibility of the divisible I’s activity upon other selves within the external world; other selves which are necessarily posited as being like the self with their own spheres or rights in which they can also exercise their own activity. The ethical law designates how we *ought* to act within these bubbles circumscribed by our rights.

It is clear therefore, that Fichte concedes the obvious point that the ‘check’ introduces a form of realism into his system, although he is eager to point out that ‘it presupposes neither a not-self present apart from the self, nor even a determination present within the self, but merely the requirement for a determination to be undertaken within it by the self as such.’<sup>549</sup> In other words, it is no conventional realism. Fichte is always keen to make this point painstakingly clear. As in the introduction of the second principle in relationship to the first, where he emphasised that the not-self can only be posited insofar as the self was posited (even though it was still posited independently of the self), he makes this same point in relation to the ‘check.’ The check only occurs ‘in consequence of the latter’s own activity in positing itself; that its outward-striving activity was...thrown back into itself, from which the self-limitation...would then very naturally follow.’<sup>550</sup> All of the above can be tidily summarised by the axiom: ‘no activity of the self, no check,’<sup>551</sup> although, the check does provide the possibility for a particular form of determining activity by the self, which is enacted in opposition to, and against, an ‘objective’ realm.

From this evaluation of how Fichte attempts to respond to some of the Valentinian questions and philosophical problems that he had initially introduced, it is clear that they remain largely unsuccessful. Although Fichte appeals to the *Anstoß* as that which occasions the infinite activity of the Absolute self to revert back into itself, there is still no explanation as to *why* it occurs in the first place. Some responses to this objection would seem to suggest that the ‘check’ is posited

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<sup>547</sup> See especially: J.G. Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right* (trans: Michael Baur), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.26, p.34, p.37, p.184, and p.265.

<sup>548</sup> See: Fichte, *The System of Ethics*, p.76.

<sup>549</sup> Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, p.190.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid, p.191.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid.



by the Absolute ego in order for it to be in a position to determine itself in a specific manner. Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), in his letter to Goethe in October 1794, presents a typical caricature of this kind of interpretation: ‘*Und all realität ist nur in dem Ich. Die Welt ist ihn nur ein ball, den das Ich geworfen hat und den es bei der reflexion wieder fängt.*’<sup>552</sup> However, as Slavoj Žižek notes: the ‘*Anstoss* is not simply the obstacle the absolute I posits to itself in order to stimulate its activity so that, by overcoming the self-posed obstacle, it asserts its creative power;’<sup>553</sup> whatever the ‘check’ is, it is not reducible to any ‘controlled’ activity of the absolute self, it is utterly opposed to this and it *is* in so far as it is not this. Breazeale also emphasises this point emphatically when commenting on the *Anstoß*; he states that: it is ‘the presence, within the I itself, of a realm of irreducible otherness, of absolute contingency and incomprehensibility.’<sup>554</sup> A considerable amount of recent Fichte scholarship has been directed at dismantling these common hermeneutical ‘myths,’ precisely by emphasising those aspects of his thought which reveal his inability to give the eschatological ‘Valentinian response’ of total re-absorption of the finite self within the Absolute ego; usually by insisting on the realist implications of the ‘check’ and the eternal ‘frustration’ of the finite I, which can never truly become synonymous with its ‘own’ infinite activity.<sup>555</sup> However, the above point should not be taken as presenting the *Anstoß*

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<sup>552</sup> Robert Pippin, ‘Fichte’s Alleged Subjective, Psychological, One-Sided Idealism’, in Sally Sedgwick (ed), *The Reception of Kant’s Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.147-171, p.147. For similar interpretations, see: F.H. Jacobi, ‘Jacobi to Fichte (1799)’, in George di Giovanni (trans/ed), *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, London, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009, pp.497-537, p.502. And, F.W.J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy* (trans: Andrew Bowie), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.108. Also: Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, London, Routledge, 2004, p.650-51. Heidegger appears to suggest a similar reading of Fichte, when he quotes Schiller approvingly. See: Martin Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom* (trans: Joan Stambaugh), Ohio, Ohio University Press, 1985, pp.187-88. Frederick Copelston is another who reads Fichte in this light: Frederick Copelston, *A History of Philosophy: 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century German Philosophy: Volume 7*, London, Continuum, 2003. And more recently, Marina Bykova proposes something similar: ‘the Fichtean self includes all reality within itself. The self does not simply encounter the world, but encompasses the whole reality, so there is nothing else beyond that self’ (Marina Bykova, ‘The Self as the World into Itself: Towards Fichte’s conception of subjectivity’, Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (eds), *Fichte, German Idealism and Early Romanticism*, New York, Rodopi, 2010, pp.131-149, p.145).

<sup>553</sup> Slavoj Žižek, ‘Fichte’s Laughter’, in Markus Gabriel and Slavoj Žižek, *Mythology, Madness and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism*, London, Continuum, 2009, pp.122-168, p.142.

<sup>554</sup> Daniel Breazeale, ‘Check or Checkmate? On the Finitude of the Fichtean Self,’ in Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma (eds), *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy*, New York, 1995, pp.87-114, p.100.

<sup>555</sup> See especially: Daniel Breazeale, ‘The Spirit of the *Wissenschaftslehre*,’ in Sally Sedgwick (ed), *The Reception of Kant’s Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling and Hegel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.171-199, p.189). Michael Baur, ‘Self-Measure and Self-Moderation in Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*,’ in Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (eds), *New Essays in Fichte’s Foundation of the Entire Doctrine of Scientific Knowledge*, New York, Prometheus, 2001, pp.81-102. And also: Robert Williams, *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1992, p.41. Kyriaki Goudeli goes so far as to treat the duplicity between

as a reaffirmation of the Kantian ‘in itself.’ If there is one thing that Fichte continually emphasised more than anything else it was that his system had overcome Kantian dualisms, especially the distinction between the ‘thing’ and the ‘thing in itself.’ Even though the not-I must be posited to account for the self’s limitation, it does not designate something that is ‘in itself’ as a realm ‘outside’ of the finitude of the I: ‘the not-I is nothing actual unless it is related to an instance of acting on the part of the I, *for only on this condition and only by this means does it become an object of consciousness. The ‘thing in itself’ is thereby abolished once and for all.*’<sup>556</sup> Whilst the *Anstoss* is never overcome – if it were then there would be no self at all – and the infinite activity of the I is never reconciled with the finite I’s attempts to receive it within its own mode of being, there is no longer an infinity or any other reality that is somehow *outside* or *apart* from the self. Henrich puts this point excellently: the *Anstoß* ‘is an other but its very otherness is to be in relation to the self or for the self.’<sup>557</sup>

Therefore, Fichte has undoubtedly transformed the Kantian ‘in itself’ in his attempt to provide a monistic first principle. The ‘in itself,’ is only posited to the extent that it is for the self and is in some sense only there because of the self’s activity; however, despite Fichte’s hope of an eventual harmonization of the finite I with its infinite activity, he never quite accounts for it. For the *Anstoß* can never totally disappear, if it did, there would simply be no self at all. It is for this reason that Hegel is able to assert that the synthesis of the finite and the infinite is incomplete<sup>558</sup> and that it even comprises a ‘bad infinite,’<sup>559</sup> and that Fichte is able to be positioned somewhere in between Kant and the ‘absolute idealists.’ So there is clearly no response to why and how finitude is possible, and there is certainly no possibility of finitude ever being fully absorbed into

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the self’s infinite activity and its ‘finite object driven activity as a ‘re-introduction of Kantian like dualisms’ (Kyriaki Goudeli, *Challenges to German Idealism*, Hampshire, Palgrave, 2002, p.75).

<sup>556</sup> J.G. Fichte, *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy: Wissenschaftslehre nova method 1796/99* (trans: Daniel Breazeale), London, Cornell University Press, 1992, p.163. Fichte states this just as emphatically in his 1795 draft letter to Jens Baggesen: ‘just as France freed man from external shackles, so my system frees him from the fetters of things in themselves, which is to say, from those external influences with which all previous systems – including the Kantian – have more or less fettered man’ (Gunter Zoller, *Fichte’s Transcendental Philosophy: The Original Duplicity of Intelligence and Will*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.29). See also: J.G. Fichte, ‘A Crystal Clear Report to the General Public Concerning the Actual Essence of the Newest Philosophy: An Attempt to Force the Reader to Understand (1801) (trans: John Botterman and William Rasch),’ in Ernst Behler (ed), *Philosophy of German Idealism*, New York, Continuum, 2003, pp.39-115, p.55.

<sup>557</sup> Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, London, Harvard, 2008, p.276.

<sup>558</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy* (trans: H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf), New York, State University of New York, 1977, p.117.

<sup>559</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6: Medieval and Modern Philosophy* (trans: Robert Brown), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, p.184.

its original infinity. It is these precise questions that those working within the Fichtean framework will attempt to answer, using Gnostic mythology as a reference point.

### **Summative Remarks**

The purpose of this chapter has been to excavate and assess the archaeological frame (rules of formation) produced, through a complex web of immediate post-Kantian philosophical interactions, which will prove foundational for the later introduction of Gnostic mythology within philosophical discourses that will be shown to be pivotal in informing the construction of certain types of Valentinian concepts of Wisdom associated with modern theology. This frame is constructed on the basis of a specific set of philosophical problems emerging within the discourse of post-Kantian philosophy, when the Kantian system is turned into a monistic project. Through close historical analysis, we have shown how these questions eventually matured and reached fruition in Fichte's 'Jena system.' Here we encountered a philosophy that began with an original monism (the Absolute and infinite activity of the Absolute ego), which was then disturbed and checked, causing finitude to fall away from this original state. The purpose of the finite ego was then to re-unite itself with its original infinite activity, however, despite attempts made by Fichte to account for this union, it was not possible within the limitations of his own philosophical commitments. We noted, throughout this analysis, that there were stark similarities with the questions and problems posed by Fichte to Valentinian wisdom theology, to the extent that they could be considered as archaeological shifts. However, although the questions and problems on which both Fichtean philosophy and Valentinian wisdom theology rotate are isomorphic in the archaeological sense, there is no final correspondence in so far as Fichte did not adopt the eschatological solutions proposed by the Gnostics to respond to these similar questions. What we are able to conclude is that these unanswered problems and questions will dictate the philosophies of the next generation of German philosophers, providing solutions that will not only consciously be modelled on Gnostic mythology, but will further provide the context in which modern theology will construct much of its concepts of Wisdom.

Now we shall explore how these questions transform into a fully developed Gnostic theology within Schelling.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Schelling and Valentinian Gnosticism: The Emergence of Gnostic Concepts and Their Authoritative Enunciation in Modern Philosophy**

In the preceding chapter, we began to explore the ‘rules of formation’ for ideas that would later develop into a distinctly Gnostic discourse within modernity. Within Fichtean philosophy, certain philosophical questions and problems surfaced (which were argued to be archaeological shifts from Valentinian discourses) which we shall here attempt to demonstrate, form the frame in which fully fledged Gnostic ‘concepts’ are produced within modern philosophy. There is no clearer example of these concepts developing than in the philosophy of Schelling, which shall be critically evaluated within this chapter, by engaging with Schelling’s philosophical journey through its four major phases: the early Transcendental or Fichtean/Spinozist Schelling of the *Naturphilosophie*; the Schelling of the *Identitätsphilosophie* (c.1801-1809); his ‘middle period’ (c.1809-1827); and his ‘late philosophy,’ characterised by his critique of Hegel and his attempt to construct a ‘positive philosophy.’ Through all of these stages, we shall attempt to document and critically assess the emerging development of Valentinian theology within Schelling’s proposals, drawing on the analysis in chapter II.

As already discussed in the introduction, Schelling’s philosophy has by no means been arbitrarily selected for the purpose of analysing the proposed advent of distinct Gnostic thought forms taking shape in modernity. But, rather, Schelling provides the philosophical substance, from which the first major modern wisdom theologies were construed, namely those of Solovyov and Bulgakov. Whilst it would be impossible to underestimate the role of Hegelian philosophy for these Russian thinkers, it is predominantly Schelling that is the key figure in this developmental process. Furthermore, their engagement with Hegel is conducted through the vehemently critical lens of this same philosophy, provided by Schelling. Thus, it is Hegel via Schelling for the Russian wisdom theologians. It is for this reason that this chapter shall be devoted to the development of Gnostic concepts within Schelling’s philosophy, although Hegelian thought will still be considered here, only to a much lesser extent.

Werner Hamacher has noted that ‘in his reminiscences of Hegel, Schwegler reports that “a fellow doctoral graduate of Hegel’s told me that during his years at the [Tübinger] *Stift* Hegel principally studied Aristotle in an ancient worm-eaten Basel edition, the only one available at that time, whilst Schelling read the Gnostics, particularly the Ophitic and *Valentinian* systems.”’<sup>560</sup> Although one’s immediate reaction to this report may simply be to dismiss it as third hand student hearsay, a closer look at Schelling’s adolescent academic writing may go some way to substantiating its content.

In 1790, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling was enrolled at the *Tübinger Stift*, by special exemption obtained by his father, at the unusually young age of fifteen, where students would study two years of philosophy and three years of theology as a preliminary to Christian ministry. Here, Schelling shared a room with two other promising young students who would also go on to play major parts in German Romanticism and Idealism respectively: Friedrich Hölderlin and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.<sup>561</sup> Despite being five years their junior, Schelling was by no means out of place intellectually; his astute and creative mind, coupled with his flair for modern and classical languages, made him something of a young prodigy. The students at the *Stift* were taught by conservative Lutherans eager to encourage devotion to Lutheran orthodoxy however, it is quite clear from various first hand reports that many of the students had become disenchanted with ‘traditional’ theology as one noted: ‘one admired in the French revolution, the triumph of reason, and the decisive victory of philosophy... There was no longer any discussion of theology. That was empty twaddle.’<sup>562</sup> This disillusionment may best account for the young Schelling’s early move away from Lutheran theology in favour of, what could be described as ‘esoteric’ speculation. There is evidence of this move as early as 1792 in his *De Prima Malorum Humanorum Origine* where he explores the notion of the ‘Fall’ whilst re-evaluating the relationship between evil and reason in a more positive light than orthodox Christianity would permit.<sup>563</sup> Bruce Matthews has recently described this ‘exegesis’ of Genesis as falling within the

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<sup>560</sup> Werner Hamacher, *Pleroma: Reading in Hegel*, California, Stanford, 1998, p.91 (my emphasis).

<sup>561</sup> Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe*, Chicago, University of Chicago, 2002, p.116.

<sup>562</sup> J.G. Phahl, *Ulrich Höllriegel, Geschite eines Magisters* (1802); quoted in: Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe*, Chicago, University of Chicago, 2002, p.119.

<sup>563</sup> See: F.W.J. Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke I:I* (ed: K.F.A. Schelling), Stuttgart, Cotta, 1856, pp.1-40.

‘Ophite and Valentinian Schools of Gnosticism.’<sup>564</sup> Similarly, Schelling’s 1793 work entitled *Über Mythen: historische Sagen und Philosopheme der ältesten Welt*; a work largely inspired by Romantic sympathies, which explores the relationship between mythology and truth<sup>565</sup>, again, highlights Schelling’s interest in, and knowledge of ‘esoteric’ mythology. The third most significant work of this period, and the one which may go some way to explaining why Schelling could have been spotted reading the Gnostics, is his 1795 Latin dissertation on Marcionism and its relationship to the Pauline epistles: *De Marcione: Paulinarum epistolarum emendatore*. He later sent this piece to his friend Hegel, who responded in thanks with a letter which is perhaps revelatory of their theological attitudes at the time:

I have at once found confirmation in it [Schelling’s dissertation] of a suspicion I have harboured for a long time, namely, that it would perhaps have done more credit to us and to mankind if no matter what heresy, damned by council and creeds, had risen to become the public system of belief, instead of the orthodox system maintaining the upper hand.<sup>566</sup>

Although Schelling’s theology dissertation is principally an historical and an exegetical work,<sup>567</sup> it nevertheless provides concrete evidence of Schelling’s early interest in Gnosticism and his familiarity with the systems associated with them. Although one may initially be forgiven for refusing to draw any profound hermeneutical conclusions from, what may at first appear to be an insignificant adolescent phase, their prominence for Schelling cannot be emphasised enough. These themes resurface far too often and with far too much clarity throughout Schelling’s entire corpus for them to be ignored. Although interpretations of Schelling’s texts shall come later, just to illustrate this point it will suffice for now to highlight several examples. For instance, in his 1802 treatise: *Bruno*, Schelling is already grappling with the problem of finitude in the wake of his adherence to an original monism, where he readily conceives of the finite realm as a ‘falling away’ (*Abfall*) from this original state: ‘men learned that the individual things had cut themselves off from the essentially identical.’<sup>568</sup> Similarly, yet even more emphatically, in his 1804 work entitled *Philosophie und Religion*, Schelling again portrays creation as the negative product of a

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<sup>564</sup> Bruce Matthews, *Schelling’s Organic Form of Philosophy: Life as the Schema of Freedom*, New York, State university of New York Press, 2011, p.65.

<sup>565</sup> See: Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke I:I*, pp.42-83.

<sup>566</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Letters* (trans: Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler), Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984, p.43.

<sup>567</sup> See: Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke I:I*, pp.115-148.

<sup>568</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Bruno: On the Natural and the Divine principle of Things* (trans: Michael Vater), New York, State University of New York Press, 1984, p.134.

crisis in the Absolute itself: ‘the origin of the phenomenal world should not be imagined, as popular religion does, as a creation, as a positive...But as a falling away [*Abfall*].’<sup>569</sup> He portrays the human soul as being the ‘fallen divine essence in man’<sup>570</sup> and contends that the ‘ultimate goal of the universe and its history is nothing other than the complete...re-absorption [*Wiederauflösung*] into the Absolute.’<sup>571</sup> Again, in his 1810 *Stuttgart Privatvorlesung* Schelling is still describing the world as being an aspect of divinity expelled from the Absolute: ‘The beginning of creation amounts indeed to a descent [*Herablassung*] of God’ and ‘God...excludes the inferior [dimension] of his essence from the superior one and expels it as it were from himself,’ which must then be re-inaugurated back into the Absolute.<sup>572</sup> And, in Schelling’s second draught (1813) of *Die Weltalter* his justification for being able to describe the internal processes of the divine is that humanity is able to ‘remember’ them, in so far as there is something within us which was once a part of that original agonistic process:

Man must be granted an essence outside and above the world; for how could he alone, of all creatures, retrace the long path of developments from the present back into the deepest night of the past, how could he alone rise up to the beginning of things unless there were in him an essence from the beginning of times. Drawn from the source of things and akin to it, what is eternal of the soul has a co-science/consciousness [*Mitt-Wissenschaft*] of creation.<sup>573</sup>

These, and similar themes are present throughout Schelling’s philosophy right up until the Berlin Lectures, not long before his death. Thus, Schelling’s early interest in Gnosticism is by no means a fleeting one, some of their most fundamental conventions remain apparent throughout a range of Schelling’s philosophical speculations.

By and large, Schelling has been a neglected figure in theological, historical, and philosophical scholarship; often simply by passed as an insignificant precursor to Hegel, or as an anti-rationalist theosophical thinker, or he is even simply ignored altogether.<sup>574</sup> However, more recently, these caricatures have been challenged and the significance of Schelling has slowly begun to be recognised. Perhaps, the most instrumental figures in this rejuvenation are Manfred

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<sup>569</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophy and Religion* (trans: Klaus Ottmann), Connecticut, Spring Publications, 2010, p.27.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid, p.31.

<sup>572</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, ‘The Stuttgart Seminars’, in: Thomas Pfau, *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F.W.J. Schelling*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1994, pp.195-244, p.204, p.207.

<sup>573</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, ‘The Ages of the World (1813)’, in: Slavoj Žižek and Judith Norman, *The Abyss of Freedom*, Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 1999, p.114.

<sup>574</sup> Bertrand Russell fails to even mention him in his *History of Western Philosophy*.

Frank and Andrew Bowie, amongst several others.<sup>575</sup> However, amongst their respective projects, and certainly prominent in Bowie, is a strong tendency to *suppress* the theological and mythical elements so apparent within Schelling's philosophy, where they are neglected as hermeneutical aids to understanding Schelling's thought.<sup>576</sup> It is important to note that the motives behind this move are largely related to the individual 'rejuvenation projects' themselves and not direct criticisms of utilising a theological approach when interpreting Schelling. These projects are largely concerned with demonstrating Schelling's significance for contemporary philosophy; and, historically speaking, Schelling's theology has always proven to be something of an *obstacle* to a recognition of his importance and therefore to the 'rejuvenation projects' themselves. However, this chapter is not concerned with vindicating Schelling, but assessing his philosophy in relation to themes that seem to be utterly and insuppressibly apparent within his philosophy, which, as we shall demonstrate, Gnosticism appears to be.

### **Schelling's Inheritance from Fichte: Transcendentalism, Spinozism, and the Naturphilosophie.**

It is quite clear from Schelling's early philosophical writings, which he produced in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, that he underwent an intellectual evolution that was typical of his generation. In his *Über die Möglichkeit einer Form der Philosophie überhaupt* (1794), Schelling upholds that the dualisms apparent within Kantian thought had rendered philosophy incomplete, and that an immediately certain first principle was needed to supplement Kant (the general attitude of

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<sup>575</sup> See, especially: Manfred Frank, *Der unendliche Mangel an Sein: Schellings Hegelkritik und die Anfänge der Marxschen Dialektik*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1975; Manfred Frank, *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1985; Manfred Frank, *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbsterkenntnis*, Stuttgart, Reclam, 1991; Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: an Introduction*, London, Routledge, 1993. Other important works which supported this process of re-discovery would include: Martin Heidegger, *Schellings Abhandlung über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*, Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1971; Xavier Tillet, *Schelling: Une Philosophie en devenir*, Paris, Vrin, 1970; Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters*, London, Verso, 1996; Slavoj Žižek, *The Abyss of Freedom*, Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 1999; see the essays collected in: Jason Wirth (ed), *Schelling Now: Contemporary Readings*, Bloomington, Indiana University press, 2005; see, also recent works emphasising Schelling's influence on psychoanalysis; especially Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan; S.J. McGrath, *The Dark Ground of Spirit: Schelling and the Unconscious*, London, Routledge, 2012; Matt Ffytche, *The Foundation of the Unconscious: Schelling, Freud, and the Birth of the Modern Psyche*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

<sup>576</sup> Disclaimers concerning Schelling's theology are made throughout Bowie's *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction* as well as in his introduction to his translation of Schelling's *On the History of Modern Philosophy*.



German philosophy towards Kant post Jacobi).<sup>577</sup> Until this point, Schelling would have been most appropriately considered a Reinholdian, although he quickly realises its limitations and seeks solace in Fichte. Manfred Baum has claimed that ‘it is very likely that Schelling’s transition from Reinhold to Fichte occurred in the summer of 1794.’<sup>578</sup> This transition becomes even more apparent in Schelling’s *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie, oder über das Unbedingte im menschlichen Wissen* (1795), where he states emphatically that: ‘it was not his (Reinhold’s) destiny to solve the intrinsic problems of philosophy, but to bring it into the clearest focus.’<sup>579</sup> Schelling then goes on to rehearse, almost verbatim, Fichte’s own philosophical contentions. He argues that the ego’s self-positing is an original *act* capable of providing philosophy with its first principle; thus moving beyond the mere static factuality of Reinhold’s *Elementar-philosophie* (Fichte’s critique of Reinhold’s first principle). He also argues, like Fichte, that the ‘finite/subjective I’ must infinitely strive to unite itself with the infinite activity of the ‘Absolute I.’ And, by redirecting philosophy in this manner, Schelling believes that there can be no reality existing ‘in itself’ outside of the I’s original act; and therefore no more Kantian dualisms. All of these are fairly familiar Fichtean points.<sup>580</sup> However, despite demonstrating his clear allegiance to Fichte, Schelling, even at this early stage, already starts to evidence an awareness of some of the tensions which were outlined in Fichte’s philosophy in the previous chapter, especially in Fichte’s failure to offer an explanation of *why* finitude occurs in the first place, and how it is to be successfully held together with the infinite. And, in anticipation of his later philosophical turns, Schelling starts to experiment with the notion of finitude returning to an absolute identity, which it once had with the infinite (with Fichte’s Absolute I itself), he states: ‘without the premise that the Absolute I is the concept of all reality, no practical philosophy can be thought of whose aim must be the end of all not-I and the recovery of the Absolute I in its ultimate identity.’<sup>581</sup> Thus, Schelling, like Fichte, accepts that there is an original unity that is

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<sup>577</sup> See: F.W.J. Schelling, ‘On the Possibility of a Form of all Philosophy’, in: Fritz Marti (ed and trans), *F.W.J. Schelling: The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays (1794-1796)*, New Jersey, Associated University Presses, 1980, pp.38-39.

<sup>578</sup> Manfred Baum, ‘The Beginnings of Schelling’s Philosophy of Nature’, in: Sally Sedgwick (ed), *The Reception of Kant’s Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp.199-216, p.202.

<sup>579</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, ‘Of the I as Principle of Philosophy, Or on the Unconditional in Human Knowledge’, in: Fritz Marti (ed and trans), *F.W.J. Schelling: The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays (1794-1796)*, New Jersey, Associated University Presses, 1980, pp.63-129, p.81.

<sup>580</sup> See: *Ibid*, p.99.

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid*, p.92.

somehow disrupted; however, unlike Fichte, Schelling is more eager to account for why this ‘stepping outside of itself,’<sup>582</sup> of the Absolute I, has occurred in the first place, and how it can resolve itself back to its original state of identity (something that Fichte thought was impossible).

Therefore, in his *Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kritizismus* (1795) Schelling is still discussing the original opposition in the Absolute I that forces it to step out of itself, but, significantly, he appears greatly dissatisfied with Fichte’s fractured Absolute; it is a stage that must be *resolved*: ‘it ought to become unnecessary.’<sup>583</sup> Thus, like Valentinian wisdom theology and Fichte before him, Schelling begins with a monistic first principle, where he is then left with the problem of finitude *per se*, which appears alienated from this ideal. The problem of finitude can be characterised by the questions concerning *why* there is finitude when there ought not to be: hence his philosophical thinking starts to revolve around these problems which were identified in chapter II: ‘why is there a realm of experience at all?’<sup>584</sup> And: ‘the very transition from the non-finite to the finite is *the problem* of all philosophy.’<sup>585</sup> There is no doubt where this is leading to; a formulation of ‘absolute identity,’ which he initially imagines by attempting to synthesise Fichte’s idealism with Spinoza’s objectivism to propose, what Schelling later describes as, an ‘inverted Spinozism,’<sup>586</sup> as elucidated in his *Von Ich*: ‘if the I is the only substance, then everything that is, is merely a quality (*accidens*) of the I.’<sup>587</sup> However, it is not long before Schelling starts to question the ‘subjective nature’ of these early formulations and re-explores this conception of monism in a more Spinozistic/objective format, which is characterised by his *Naturphilosophie*.

Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* is perhaps best understood as an extension of his earlier experiments of combining Fichte with Spinoza, only in this instance, giving priority to Spinoza’s objectivism. Scholarly opinion is somewhat divided over the inspiration for Schelling’s decision to pursue this project. Frederick Beiser has suggested that Schelling was influenced by the

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<sup>582</sup> Ibid, p.110.

<sup>583</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, ‘Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism’, in: Fritz Marti (ed and trans), *F.W.J. Schelling: The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays (1794-1796)*, New Jersey, Associated University Presses, 1980, pp.156-197, p.166.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid, p.175.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid, p.177.

<sup>586</sup> See: F.W.J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy* (trans: Andrew Bowie), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.108.

<sup>587</sup> <sup>587</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, ‘Of the I as Principle of Philosophy, Or on the Unconditional in Human Knowledge’, pp.63-129, p.93.

Romantics.<sup>588</sup> However, Ryan Foster and Manfred Frank play down the significance of the Romantic circle on the young Schelling, Foster states that: ‘most of the architectonic of Schelling’s philosophy of nature was already in place before he ever met the Schlegels or Novalis.’<sup>589</sup> Whilst Foster is correct to note that the foundations of Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* were constructed prior to his introduction to the ‘Jena circle,’ Schelling’s positions are clearly typical of the Romantic response to Fichte, and also embody the Romantic’s reverence for nature, which could have been introduced to him prior to his move to Jena. For instance, as early as 1795, in his *Urtheil und Sein*, Hölderlin criticises Fichte for failing to account for absolute identity, which he believes must necessarily precede any division of the absolute being; hence by commencing with the self-positing I, which already presupposes a division of subject and object, Fichte is failing to commence with the Absolute itself, which is characterised by complete simplicity, and therefore his philosophy cannot be the complete and absolute system, which he claims it to be. He states that:

Where subject and object are absolutely, not just partially united, and hence so united that no division can be undertaken, without destroying the essence [*Wesen*] of the thing that is to be sundered, there and not otherwise can we talk of an absolute being...When I say ‘*ich bin ich*’ the subject and the object are not so united that absolutely no sundering can be undertaken...On the contrary the *ich* is only possible through the sundering of the *ich vom ich*.<sup>590</sup>

All of these positions Hölderlin had already anticipated in his 26 January 1795 letter to Hegel,<sup>591</sup> and before Schelling’s first major work on the philosophy of nature: his 1797 *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur*. Thus, when he moves to Jena in 1798, to take up a teaching position, where he is brought into Friedrich Niethammer’s intellectual circle of friends - which included the Schlegel brothers, Novalis (G.F.P. Hardenberg), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Friedrich

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<sup>588</sup> See: Beiser, *German Idealism*, p.349.

<sup>589</sup> Ryan Foster, *The Creativity of Nature: The Genesis of Schelling’s Naturphilosophie 1795-1799*, Cambridge, Proquest, 2009, p.7; see, also: Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2004, p.97; Elizabeth Millan-Zaibert, *Frederick Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2002, p.42.

<sup>590</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke IV* (ed F. Beißner), Stuttgart, 1943, p.216; Friedrich Hölderlin, ‘Judgement and Being’, in: H.S. Harris, *Hegel’s Development: Toward the Sunlight 1770-1801*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1972, p.515.

<sup>591</sup> See: Friedrich Hölderlin, ‘Letter to Hegel: 26 January 1795’, in: J.M. Bernstein, *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp.188-190.

Schiller, amongst others – he is already familiar with some of their ideas,<sup>592</sup> which included hostility towards Fichte's subjectivism and a mystical appreciation of nature.<sup>593</sup>

In respect to the task at hand, there is no need to offer an exhaustive elucidation of the intricate (and largely incorrect) 'scientific' propositions of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*; it will suffice to offer a broad outline of the intentions of this project. First and foremost, Schelling's philosophy of nature can be interpreted as an attempt to read Fichte's philosophy into the production of nature itself. This concern alone is enough to inspire Schelling to oppose the popular Newtonian conception of physical reality that was prevalent at the time. Robert Stern has stated that: 'Schelling stands opposed to the Newtonian picture of matter as made up of hard, impenetrable, inert particles that are acted on by forces external to them.'<sup>594</sup> Schelling persistently rejects this Newtonian conception of nature, precisely because it does not permit the dynamic internal construction of nature that Schelling envisages as an 'equilibrium of active forces that stand in polar opposition to one another.'<sup>595</sup> Thus, he will claim that 'absolute inertness... is a concept without sense or significance' and 'there is no seeing how the primary particles, in so far as they are absolutely impenetrable, and are thus incapable of compression, can communicate motion to another body.'<sup>596</sup> These insights are also derived from Kant's dynamic understanding of matter which he outlined in his 1786 *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft*.<sup>597</sup> Schelling attempts to read the oppositional dynamics of the Fichtean construction of self-consciousness in

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<sup>592</sup> See: Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins, *The Age of German Idealism*, New York, Routledge, 1993, p.162.

<sup>593</sup> Ryan Foster notes that Goethe and Schiller would often poke fun at Fichte's subjectivism; taking great offence to his conception of the objective world and what this implied for nature (see: Ryan Foster, *The Creativity of Nature: The Genesis of Schelling's Naturphilosophie 1795-1799*, Proquest, 2009, p. 244); Novalis also began to question the significance of Fichte's subjectivism in 1796, when he wrote: 'I – has, perhaps, like all ideas of reason merely regulative, classificatory use – nothing at all in relation to reality' (Novalis, *Fichte-Studies* (trans: Jane Kneller), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.xvi).

<sup>594</sup> Robert Stern, 'Introduction', in: F.W.J. Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (trans: Robert Stern), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p.x.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid.

<sup>596</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (trans: Robert Stern), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp.165-166.

<sup>597</sup> For instance, Kant will state: 'only these two moving forces of matter can be thought. For all motion that one matter can impress on another, since in this regard each of them is considered only as a point, must always be viewed as imparted in the straight line between the two points. But in this straight line there are only two possible motions; the one through which the two points remove themselves from one another, the second through which they approach one another... the force causing the first motion is called *repulsive force*, whereas the second is called the *attractive force*. Therefore, only these two kinds of forces can be thought, as forces to which all moving forces in material nature must be reduced' (Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (trans: Michael Friedman), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p.35). Schelling later comments on this work thus: 'the Kantian construction of matter first led to a higher view directed against the materialist approach' (F.W.J. Schelling, *On University Studies (1803)* (trans: E.S. Morgan), Ohio, Ohio University Press, 1966, p.130).

to the production of nature itself, by highlighting the interplay between opposing forces within nature, which he chiefly explores through the phenomena of heat and combustion, light and air, and electricity and magnetism.<sup>598</sup> One of the most significant positions to emerge out of Schelling's 1797 *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* is that, contrary to Fichte, the natural world is no longer a negative objective reality posited for the end of the subject to realise its own freedom, but that the dynamic processes which construct the subject, are also as primal in the construction of the objective natural world: 'we maintain that matter is real outside of us, and matter itself, in so far as it is real outside us...is possessed of attractive and repulsive forces.'<sup>599</sup> The significance of Schelling's insights are realised in their indication of an absolute process that points beyond the specific subjective and the objective constructions; an original process that is replicated in these respective instances, which he expresses more clearly a year later in his 1798 *Von der Weltseele*: 'the universal principle of life individualises itself in every individual living being.'<sup>600</sup>

In his *Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie* (1799) Schelling continues to grapple with the construction of nature from the perspective of Fichtean logic. Interestingly, even here, he is still concerned with the problem of finitude and accounting for why and how an existence apart from the original monistic identity can be possible: 'the supreme problem of the philosophy of nature: what cause brought forth the first duplicity out of the universal identity of nature.'<sup>601</sup> However, he still continues to uphold the typical Fichtean positions within his outline of the construction of nature. For instance, he affirms the necessity of an *Anstoß* occurring within an infinite activity: 'in order for a real activity to come to be out of an infinite (and to that extent ideal) productive activity, that activity must be *inhibited, retarded*.'<sup>602</sup> Similarly, he contends that being is nothing more than a constructive activity: 'being itself is nothing other than the constructing itself.'<sup>603</sup> Moreover, Schelling argues that nature is comprised of an infinite activity

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<sup>598</sup> For an excellent review of Schelling's treatment of these natural phenomena; see his own evaluation in: F.W.J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern philosophy* (trans: Andrew Bowie), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp.114-133.

<sup>599</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (trans: Robert Stern), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p.173.

<sup>600</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of a Philosophy of Nature* (trans: Keith Peterson), New York, State University of New York Press, 2004, p.xxi.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid, p.10.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid, p.5.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid, p.13.

which requires the construction of its original duplicity through a check that gives it a concrete reality.<sup>604</sup> He contends that this process is at the base of all natural phenomena and every organism, which he affirms by appealing to Kant's conception of matter as the dynamic interrelationship of attractive and repulsive forces, read through Fichte's insistence that consciousness requires the mutual limitation of opposed activities within a single whole: 'each organism is itself nothing other than the collective expression for a multiplicity of actants, which mutually limit themselves to a determinate sphere.'<sup>605</sup> Hence, it is quite clear that Schelling has simply allowed his original philosophical problems to migrate into the philosophy of nature. He is still concerned with why and how an original duplicity occurs, be it in the Absolute I or in nature.

Therefore, the significance of the *Naturphilosophie* is not so much in Schelling's move away from Fichte, after all, he is still working very much from within the Fichtean framework; he just applies it to the objective/natural world. For Schelling, Fichte's subjectivism and Spinoza's objectivism are fundamentally opposite sides of the same coin.<sup>606</sup> Schelling describes his *Naturphilosophie* as the 'Spinozism of physics,'<sup>607</sup> and its most significant contribution to Schelling's development is that it points beyond Fichtean thought, in so far as it comprehends the significance of the objective world:

There is no place in this science for idealist methods of explanation, such as transcendental philosophy is fitted to supply, since for it nature is nothing more than the organ of self-consciousness, and everything in nature is necessary merely because it is only through the medium of such a nature that self-consciousness can take place.<sup>608</sup>

Now Schelling comprehends the construction of nature and self-consciousness to be underpinned by the same fundamental process that points towards a more original reality of absolute monism that Fichte could not imagine; fundamentally, it is a step towards Schelling's attempts to account for finitude, both subjective and objective, as a falling away from an original whole. However, first he must account for such an original identity which he explores in the second phase of his philosophy: the philosophy of Identity.

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<sup>604</sup> Ibid, pp.15-16.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid, p.51.

<sup>606</sup> Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, p.108.

<sup>607</sup> Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, p.194.

<sup>608</sup> Ibid, p.194.

### Identitätsphilosophie: Schelling's Original Monism.

Although Schelling's philosophy of identity, which is said to mark his definitive break from Fichte, is typically thought to commence with his *Darstellung des Systems meiner Philosophie* (1801), his articulation of an absolute identity, despite still utilising Fichtean language, appears to be apparent within the *System des transcendentalen Idealismus* (1800). In this work, Schelling initially appears to have negated the contentions of his philosophy of Nature, by again highlighting the necessity of Fichte's transcendental method. For instance, he claims that: 'self-consciousness circumscribes the entire horizon of our knowing'<sup>609</sup> and 'the self arises through the act of self-consciousness and thus apart from this act the self is nothing.'<sup>610</sup> Despite Schelling's initial re-adherence to Fichte's transcendentalism, he is keen to accommodate his philosophy of nature within this method itself, by proposing that matter can be utilised to unite the two opposing activities of subject and object within the self. Firstly, he notes that:

We must encounter the traces of two activities, of which one, in the absence of limits, would produce the positive infinite [a pure subject], and the other the negative [the production of the self limits its own infinite activity]...these two activities cannot be absolutely opposed to each other without being activities of one and the same identical subject. So nor can they be united in one and the same product without a third activity which synthesises them both.<sup>611</sup>

And, for Schelling, this synthesising product is nothing other than matter itself:

In constructing matter the self is in truth constructing itself. The third act is that by means of which the self as sensing becomes an object to itself. But this is incapable of derivation unless the two activities, so far completely separated, are exhibited in one and the same identical product. This product, namely matter, is thus a complete construction of the self.<sup>612</sup>

Thus, transcendental philosophy and the philosophy of nature become united and 'matter is indeed nothing else but mind viewed in an equilibrium of its activities.'<sup>613</sup>

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<sup>609</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (trans: Peter Heath), Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 2001, p.17.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid, p.25.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid, p.82.

<sup>612</sup> Ibid, p.91.

<sup>613</sup> Ibid, p.92. Fichte later conceives this move as a regression to dogmatic philosophy. He states: 'I assert: nature as object is only thought by you it only exists to the extent that you think it' (see: J.G. Fichte, 'Commentaries on Schelling's Transcendental Idealism and Presentation of my System of Philosophy (1800-1801)', in: Michael Vater and David Wood (eds), *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondences*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2012, p.119. For Schelling's own critique of Fichte see: his *Darlegung des wahren Verhältnisses der Naturphilosophie zur verbesserten Fichteschen Lehre*.

Schelling argues that three forms of intuition can be identified in nature: a simple intuition of ‘stuff’ which can be identified through sensation; matter itself which is posited through ‘productive intuition’ and thirdly ‘organisation’ which attempts to construct intelligence by ‘organising matter’ into a hierarchy of organisms which appear in evolutionary stages until the highest organism is reached which is identical with consciousness:

The intelligence will appear to itself, not merely qua organic as such, but standing at the summit of organisation. It can regard the other organisations only as intermediate stages, throughout which the most perfect gradually extricates itself from the fetters of matter...by way of which it becomes completely an object to itself.<sup>614</sup>

Thus, strikingly, in anticipation of Hegel’s *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807) Schelling appears to be conceiving the world as an evolutionary process that culminates in the self’s self-awareness. This move leads Schelling to the conclusion that this process itself, in contradiction to Fichte, must necessarily precede consciousness’ own self-awareness and ‘must thus appear, not as conditioned thereby, but rather as the condition thereof.’<sup>615</sup>

This conception of the organic production of the self therefore requires Schelling to posit several mutually conditioned dichotomies: the unconscious and the conscious, necessity and freedom, and the natural world and the human world. As we have already noted, for Schelling the organic world is part of the self’s own construction; but given the fact that this is the necessary condition for the intelligent consciousness, the latter can never comprehend that ‘it produces this world out of itself’<sup>616</sup> this becomes buried in the unconscious. Thus in the first instance we have the priority of the unconscious, nature, and necessity.<sup>617</sup> However, this process is subordinated to the construction of the intelligent self which opens up the possibility for the conscious, self-determining world.<sup>618</sup> Following Fichte, Schelling contends that our freedom is

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<sup>614</sup> Ibid, p.125.

<sup>615</sup> Ibid, p.127.

<sup>616</sup> Ibid, p.159.

<sup>617</sup> Martin Heidegger notes that Schelling’s move from the primacy of being to unconscious willing is a watershed in western philosophy (see: Martin Heidegger, *What is called Thinking?* (trans: J. Glenn Gray), New York, Harper, 1968, pp.90-91). S.J. McGrath has also noted that ‘prototypes for three of the major models of the unconscious, the Freudian bio-personal unconscious, the Jungian collective unconscious, and the Lacanian semiotic unconscious, can be traced back to Schelling’ (S.J. McGrath, *The Dark Ground of Spirit: Schelling and the Unconscious*, New York, Routledge, 2012, p.1).

<sup>618</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, p.159.



realised through our interaction with other selves which is governed by shared rights and the moral law.<sup>619</sup>

Schelling suggests that this process or history is conditioned by teleology; a purposeful *progression* within history that is driving towards an ideal: ‘the concept of history embodies the notion of an infinite tendency to progress.’<sup>620</sup> This ideal is principally to reveal the highest stage of self-consciousness, as a universal task, which is characterised by legal, political, and most importantly, moral qualities.<sup>621</sup> Within this teleological process, Schelling paradoxically imagines an interplay between the freedom of individual consciousness and the necessity of the unconscious drive of nature to progress to the goal. Although he attempts to hold them together, he appears to give clear precedence to the pre-determination of history that is governed by a goal and realised through freedom. If his teleological process necessarily presupposes a ‘pre-established harmony’ between freedom and necessity, Schelling argues that it is ‘conceivable through some higher thing...[which] is the common source of the intelligent and...the free.’<sup>622</sup> And it is precisely this ‘higher thing’ that Schelling posits as the precedence of an ‘absolute identity’:

Now if this higher thing be nothing else but the ground of identity between the absolutely subjective and the absolutely objective, the conscious and the unconscious...then this higher thing itself can be neither subject or object, nor both at once, but only the *absolute identity, in which is no duality at all*.<sup>623</sup>

However, given its nature, this higher thing cannot become an object of knowledge but only of belief in the absolute or God which transforms this teleological process into a providential one, which gives us the religious consciousness; for Schelling, like Fichte before him, conflates God with the moral order itself.<sup>624</sup> Thus, until the moral order is realised one can say that God does not exist; God exists when the moral order is realised as the end of the teleological process through every individual’s conscious contribution. To this extent one can even say, as Schelling indeed does, that ‘every individual intelligence can be regarded as a constitutive part of God.’<sup>625</sup>

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<sup>619</sup> Ibid, p.188.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid, p.202.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid, p.202.

<sup>622</sup> Ibid, p.208.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid, p.208 (my emphasis).

<sup>624</sup> See: J.G. Fichte, ‘On the Basis of our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World’, in: Daniel Breazeale (ed and trans), *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings*, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1994, pp.141-155.

<sup>625</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, p.206.

Thus, history is a progressive revelation of God which can only culminate in the completion of the historical process and the self-consciousness of God. It is worth quoting Schelling's illustrative summary of this process at length:

If we think of history as a play in which everyone involved performs his part quite freely and as he pleases, a rational development of this muddled drama is conceivable only if there be a single spirit who speaks in everyone, and if the playwright, whose mere fragments are the individual actors, has already so harmonised beforehand the objective outcome of the whole with the free play of every participant, that something rational must indeed emerge at the end of it. But now if the playwright were to exist independently of his drama, we should be merely the actors who speak the lines he has written. If he does not exist independently of us, but reveals and discloses himself successively only, through the very play of our own freedom, so that without this freedom he himself would not be, then we are collaborators of the whole and have ourselves invented the particular roles we play.<sup>626</sup>

Schelling goes on to argue that art provides the best revelation of this pre-established harmony of the conscious and the unconscious/freedom and necessity/nature and self-consciousness in its ability to utilise the dichotomies simultaneously in its act of producing.<sup>627</sup>

Thus, Schelling has attempted to outline his conception of an original absolute identity as a necessary presupposition for synthesising Fichte's transcendental philosophy and his own philosophy of nature, which he seemingly starts to imagine as two parts of a single philosophy.

He outlines this in detail in his 1801 *Darstellung des Systems meiner Philosophie*. Here, Schelling draws again the Kantian distinction between an appearance of a thing and how a thing 'really is' in itself. This distinction is fashioned as an attempt to 'solve' the problem of finitude that his monism has created; essentially, he attempts to deny its reality 'in itself;' finitude is simply an 'appearance'. He reasons that:

Absolute identity is simply infinite. For if it were finite, then the ground of its finitude would lie either in itself or not in itself, outside it. In the first case, it would be the cause of some determination in itself, hence something simultaneously causing and caused, and therefore not absolute identity. In the second case, the ground of its finitude would be outside it. But there is nothing outside it... Therefore, just as surely as it is, is it infinite.<sup>628</sup>

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<sup>626</sup> Ibid, p.210.

<sup>627</sup> See: Ibid, pp.215-236. And, also: F.W.J. Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art (1802)* (trans: Douglas Stott), Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

<sup>628</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, 'Presentation of My System of Philosophy' (trans: Michael Vater), in: *The Philosophical Forum: XXXII:IV, 2000, pp.339-371*, p.352.

Therefore, absolute identity can never cease to be absolute identity as long as it is and thus ‘everything that is, is absolute identity in itself...Everything that is, is *in itself* identical.’<sup>629</sup> Schelling then draws the conclusion that ‘there is no finitude [in itself].’<sup>630</sup> Hence, in a bid to solve the problem of finitude he redirects his philosophy in the direction of attempting to demonstrate that: ‘absolute identity (the infinite) has not stepped beyond itself and that everything that is, insofar as it is, is infinity itself.’<sup>631</sup> However, Schelling now has the problem of accounting for the fact that we perceive ourselves to be finite individuals. He attempts to suggest that this is merely a result of self- reflection, where the subject and object are distinguished and so too is mind and nature. But *in itself* ‘this separation simply does not happen, since everything that *is* is one, and within the totality is absolute identity itself.’<sup>632</sup> This contention leads Schelling to confirm, in clear Spinozist fashion, that ‘each individual being is as such a determined form of the being of absolute identity, but not its very being, which is only in totality.’<sup>633</sup> However, these positions create the obvious problem of how Schelling could have knowledge of this fact; in other words, how someone could philosophise from the absolute’s perspective. He attempts to address these methodological issues in his later clarifications of his system with little success.<sup>634</sup>

Despite his insistence on the non-reality of finitude ‘in itself’ the problem of finitude does not go away. This can be seen clearly in his 1802 *Bruno* - styled in the form of a Platonic dialogue - where he adopts rather esoteric modes of explanation, despite claiming to adhere to the Kantian restrictions of metaphysical reflection.<sup>635</sup> For, if one is philosophising from within the absolute itself ‘philosophy is necessarily esoteric, by its very nature.’<sup>636</sup> It is here that Schelling begins to

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<sup>629</sup> Ibid.

<sup>630</sup> Ibid, p.353.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid.

<sup>632</sup> Ibid, p.357.

<sup>633</sup> Ibid, p.361.

<sup>634</sup> See: F.W.J. Schelling, ‘Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy (1802)’ (trans: Michael Vater), in: *The philosophical Forum: XXXII:IV, 2001, pp.373-397.*

<sup>635</sup> In his introduction to the translation, Michael Vater claims that Schelling is embarking on ‘speculative Kantian metaphysics.’ Kant’s critique of metaphysics, put simply, is that it projects forms of experiential truth onto a context where there can be no means of verification, and thus hypostasises mundane finite phenomena e.g. the persistence of consciousness becomes the immortal soul and so forth. However, technically, Schelling avoids these critiques deliberately in so far as his principle of an absolute identity is not taken from a mode of experience; it is an *a priori* logical idea.

<sup>636</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Bruno or On the Natural and the Divine Principle of Things* (trans: Michael Vater), New York, State University of New York Press, 1984, p.133.

experiment with the possibility of finitude (at least as an appearance) falling away from its original identity:

The soul is the most similar to the divine and the immortal, while the body most closely approximates the polymorphous, divisible, and ever changeable. Men learned that the individual things had *cut themselves off from the essentially identical*... Now we notice that concrete things are similar to the essentially identical; we perceive that they strive to imitate its identity but never achieve a state of perfect similarity. Since this is so, *we must have known the archetype of the essentially identical, the absolutely indivisible, in some non-temporal way, before birth as it were.*<sup>637</sup>

It is clear that Schelling is working from within the structures of the Valentinian cosmology that were outlined in chapter II, in his attempts to negatively explain finitude. However, it is important to note that this mythology is only a description of the *appearance* of things, *in itself* ‘the finite and the infinite are completely identical in reality.’<sup>638</sup> However, despite this absolute monism, given the fact of finite experience (even if it is only an appearance) Schelling is forced to concede that ‘the absolute identity of all things also contains within itself [the possibility of] the difference of all forms.’<sup>639</sup> Thus, the original identity must be said to ‘include the difference of all things in an indivisible unity....the universe sleeps in an infinitely fruitful womb.’<sup>640</sup> In realising this possibility of difference, residing in this idea within the absolute itself, the world is actualised in appearance ‘in which, for themselves, but not for the eternal, they withdraw from the absolute and achieve existence within time.’<sup>641</sup> Schelling even appears to narrate the Valentinian myth of a fallen demiurge to describe this process: once withdrawn from the absolute ‘*it shatters the perfection of that first unity*, and recovering for itself infinitely many things, it breathes forth what it took from above in innumerable many individual beings. In this way everything that exists originates from a unity, though it is separated from it.’<sup>642</sup>

In his 1804 *System* Schelling further reiterates how he can comprehend this fact, and seems to state explicitly that he can philosophise from the Absolute’s perspective precisely because we are aspects (albeit fallen) of that Absolute itself:

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<sup>637</sup> Ibid, p.134.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid, p.158.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid, p.159.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid, p.160.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid, p.167.

The knower and that which is known are the same. That distinction itself is already a product of our subjectivity and thus of our finitude...in truth, there does not ever nor anywhere exist...a self...or non-self. To say, *I know or I am knowing* already [posits] the *proton pseudos*. I know nothing...Not I know, but only totality knows in me...Yet this One that knows is also the only thing known...for the knowing and the known are not different but the same.<sup>643</sup>

Schelling regards the realm of appearances, which constitute our mode of knowing as a negative sphere isolated from the unity which it is in itself and strives to know for itself: 'the phenomenal world is merely the stage on which things appear, not according to their *Being* in God [in themselves] but according to their own life and, precisely therefore, according to the *law of nothingness, privation, and finitude*.'<sup>644</sup>

We have already seen that Schelling's negative conception of finitude (given its state of contradicting his ideal monism) is something which 'ought not to be' and is already interpreted through the medium of 'Valentinian mythology' as a falling away from the divine. This is brought into even sharper focus in *Philosophie und Religion* (1804).

It is most likely to have been intended as the promised accompanying work to *Bruno*, only in an adapted form. It may have been informed by his correspondence with his friend and interlocutor Carl August Eschenmayer (1768-1852) who had criticised Schelling's conception of the Absolute and had queried how the Absolute could duplicate itself through its own self differentiation.<sup>645</sup> The work is somewhat polemical in nature; Xavier Tilliette suggests that this can be explained by taking note of Schelling's environment at the time; having recently married his long term lover Caroline Schlegel, he had taken a teaching post in the University of Würzburg, which apparently had a fideistic stronghold including a sizable number of Jacobi's supporters.<sup>646</sup>

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<sup>643</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, 'System of Philosophy in General and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular' (trans: Thomas Pfau), in: Thomas Pfau, *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F.W.J. Schelling*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1994, pp.139-194, p.143.

<sup>644</sup> Ibid, p.184 (my emphasis).

<sup>645</sup> See, especially: C.A. Eschenmayer, *Die Philosophie in ihrem Uebergang zur Nichtphilosophie*, Erlangen, 1803. Eschenmayer states that: 'Here is the point where I part with Schelling. For him God is the absolute, for me the Absolute is the after-image [*Nachbild*] of reason and God is beyond it' (C.A. Eschenmayer, 'Letter from Eschenmayer to J. J. Wagner, April 5, 1805', in: F.W.J. Schelling, *Briefe und Dokumente: I* (ed: Horst Fuhrmans) Bouvier, 1962, p.320, cited in: F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophy and Religion* (trans: Klaus Ottmann), Connecticut, Spring Publications, 2010, p.XIII.

<sup>646</sup> See: Xavier Tilliette, *Schelling Biographie* (trans: Susanne Schaper), Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 2004, p.145.

The tone of the work is set early on when Schelling declares that: ‘the true mysteries of philosophy have as their most noble and indeed their soul content the eternal birth of all things,’<sup>647</sup> which he, again describes as a ‘tearing away’ from an original oneness.<sup>648</sup> He contends that this splitting up is the product of the Absolute’s ‘self-recognition.’<sup>649</sup> He explores various philosophical and religious contexts which he believes could be regarded as similar to his own contention; notably he rejects the Neoplatonic theory of emanation and Zoroastrian dualism.<sup>650</sup> Finally, he dismisses the possibility of finitude being purposively and positively created, instead claiming that: ‘Its [the phenomenal world’s] cause...cannot lie in an impartation [*Mittheilung*] of reality from the Absolute to the finite world...it can only lie in a *remove* [*Entfernung*], in a *falling away* [*Abfall*] from the Absolute.’<sup>651</sup> Schelling cryptically alludes to these positions being ‘the tenet of the Greek mystery cult’s secret teachings...that the origin of the phenomenal world should not be imagined, as popular religion does, as a creation, as a positive...but as a falling away.’<sup>652</sup> He even contends, in Valentinian fashion, that there is a spiritual component in humanity that contains the ‘fallen divine essence in man’ which must be re-absorbed into the Absolute: ‘the ultimate goal of the universe and its history is nothing other than the complete reconciliation [*Versöhnung*] with and re-absorption [*Wiederauflösung*] into the Absolute.’<sup>653</sup>

Schelling will later concede that his presentation of this falling away thesis is not as clear as he would like, even if the ‘main idea’ is to his satisfaction. He later writes to Eschenmayer commenting on this work stating that: ‘it might be necessary to improve upon my, in many instances, faulty expressions as far as the main idea is concerned.’<sup>654</sup> The modifications that Schelling would go on to make to his system lead us roughly into the next major phase of Schelling’s philosophy, which has come to be regarded as the ‘middle period.’

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<sup>647</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophy and Religion* (trans: Klaus Ottmann), Connecticut, Spring Publications, 2010, p.8.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid, p.17.

<sup>649</sup> Ibid, pp.21-22.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid, pp.24-26.

<sup>651</sup> Ibid, p.26.

<sup>652</sup> Ibid, p.27.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid, p.31.

<sup>654</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, ‘Letter to Eschenmayer, July 10, 1804’, in: F.W.J. Schelling, *Briefe und Dokumente: I* (ed: Horst Fuhrmans) Bouvier, 1962, p.320-21, cited in: F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophy and Religion* (trans: Klaus Ottmann), Connecticut, Spring Publications, 2010, p.60. Schelling also confirms this point in the preface to his 1809 work on human freedom.

### The ‘Middle Period’: Narrating God’s Agonistic Becoming.

Schelling’s seminal *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände* (1809) was his last significant publication to occur within his lifetime and it stands at the watershed of his transition from his identity philosophy to the themes that will rise to prominence in the ‘middle period.’ Typically, the work is described as an exercise in *theodicy*.<sup>655</sup> However, whilst this is not incorrect, there are many themes that underlie this enigmatic work. Broadly speaking, Schelling’s purpose is to justify the reality of evil as a necessary component to the possibility of human freedom, following Kant’s conception of *radical evil*, which he outlined in his *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1793).<sup>656</sup> Although, Schelling’s essay can also be read as a reformulation of the basic problems which he grappled with in his *Philosophie und Religion* as an attempt to account for the reality of human finitude in light of an infinite monistic whole, and their mutual relationship; which Schelling now imagines through the medium of a shared radical freedom.

The work commences with an affirmation of pantheism: ‘if pantheism denotes nothing more than the doctrine of the immanence of things in God, every rational viewpoint in some sense must be drawn to this doctrine.’<sup>657</sup> Despite this affirmation, Schelling outlines the difficulties of compatibility with the one and the many that such a doctrine necessarily entails. He suggests that these difficulties are largely the product of a misunderstanding of the function of the copula in the statement: ‘God is the world’: ‘for, if, admittedly, it seems at first glance as if freedom, which was unable to maintain itself in opposition to God, had perished in identity here, then one can say that this appearance is only the result of an imperfect and empty notion of the law of identity.’<sup>658</sup> Schelling prefers to imagine a more harmonious conception that upholds difference within the identity of pantheism, where he gives the example of ‘the containment of one thing within another. An individual body part, like the eye, is only possible within the whole of the organism; nonetheless it has its own life for itself.’<sup>659</sup> In light of these pantheistic observations,

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<sup>655</sup> See, especially: Bernard Freydenberg, *Schelling’s Dialogical Freedom Essay: Provocative Philosophy Then and Now*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2008, pp.5-19.

<sup>656</sup> See: Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (trans: Allen Wood and George di Giovanni), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp.31-193.

<sup>657</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (trans: Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt), New York, State University of New York, 2006, p.11.

<sup>658</sup> Ibid, p.17.

<sup>659</sup> Ibid, p.18.

Schelling contends that finitude is a self-revelation of God and that, furthermore, the world can, and indeed must be, considered as sharing a univocal 'Being' with God which legitimises the possibility of this self-revelation: 'The procession [*Folge*] of things from God is a self-revelation of God. But God can only reveal himself to himself in what is like him, in free beings acting on their own, for whose Being there is no ground other than God but who are as God is.'<sup>660</sup> In his search for this 'common denominator,' he explores this notion of a common ground between God and the world, which leads to the suggestion that both God and the world can be contained within a shared participation in an act of primal *willing* [*Urwille*]: 'in the final and highest judgement, there is no other Being than will. Will is primal Being [*Ur-sein*] to which alone all predicates of Being apply.'<sup>661</sup> According to Schelling, following Kant, the freedom of this will must be measured by its original capacity to commit both good and evil.<sup>662</sup> In his search for the common origin of this primal will, Schelling argues that it can be located in the 'ground' of God's own being, which, he claims, must be distinguished from God *per se*:

Since nothing is prior to, or outside of God, he must have the ground of his existence in himself. All philosophies say this; but they speak of this ground as of a mere concept without making it into something real and actual. This ground of his existence, which God has in himself, is not God considered absolutely, that is in so far as he exists; for it is only the ground of his existence. It is nature – in God, a being indeed inseparable, yet still distinct, from him.<sup>663</sup>

Schelling appears to be elucidating a rather heterodox reading of the classical theological insistence that God is identical with his existence e.g. his essence is his existence, by positing a seemingly 'real' distinction between the two. He claims that the ground has precedence over God's existence in one sense, to the extent that a possibility can have precedence over an actuality, yet at the same time affirms, in Aristotelian fashion, that God has precedence over his ground, in so far as the ground is only the ground of God if the actuality of God is assumed to be prior to his possibility; otherwise it would simply be an empty possibility and not specifically the possibility of God.<sup>664</sup> Schelling then applies a rather bizarre kind of metaphysical logic in an attempt to simultaneously hold together the free independence of creatures and their absolute dependency on God:

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<sup>660</sup> Ibid.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid, p.21.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid, p.23.

<sup>663</sup> Ibid, p.27.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid, p.28.



The concept of becoming is the only one appropriate to the nature of things. But they cannot become in God...since they are different from him *toto genere*...in order to be divided from God, they must *become in a ground different from God*. Since, however, nothing indeed can be *outside God*, this contradiction can only be resolved by things having their ground in that which in God himself is not *he himself*, that is, in that which is *the ground of his existence*.<sup>665</sup>

Thus, Schelling's actual distinction between the ground of God's existence and God himself allows Schelling to posit the disparity between God and the world which permits their mutual freedom, whilst also upholding their pantheistic identity, in so far as they are both produced from a common *Ungrund* of pure will, characterised by *yearning and desire*, which 'gives birth' to both.<sup>666</sup> For Schelling, this primal will of desire is inherently anarchistic, unruly, and free and is both the common ground of God and the world and of each of their respective 'freedoms' which is realised through the ground itself and the dominion that one must exert over this anarchic base:

After the eternal act of self-revelation, everything in the world is, as we see it now, rule, order and form; but anarchy [*Regellose*] still lies in the ground, as if it could break through once again, and nowhere does it appear as if order and form were what is original but rather as if initial anarchy had been brought to order, This is the incomprehensible base of reality in things, *the invisible remainder*...remaining eternally in the ground.<sup>667</sup>

Schelling then proceeds to narrate the process of this dialectic as it unravels in God himself through a Trinitarian conception, which is deeply dependent on Jacob Boehme's theosophical speculations:<sup>668</sup>

Corresponding to the yearning, which as the still dark ground is the first stirring of divine existence, an inner, reflexive representation is generated in God himself through which, since it can have no other object than God, God sees himself in an exact image of himself. This representation is the first in which God, considered as absolute, is realised although only in himself; this representation is with God in the beginning and is the God who was begotten in God himself. This representation is at the same time the understanding – the word – of this yearning and the eternal spirit which perceiving the word within itself, and at the same time the infinite yearning, and impelled by the love that it itself is, proclaims the word so that the

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<sup>665</sup> Ibid (my emphasis).

<sup>666</sup> Ibid.

<sup>667</sup> Ibid, p.29 (my emphasis).

<sup>668</sup> For instance, see: Boehme's conception of the threefold internal becoming of God in the first twenty three chapters of his *Mysterium Magnum* (Jacob Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum: I* (trans: John Sparrow), California, San Rafael, 2007, pp.1-145). O'Regan has produced an excellent study of Boehme's relationship to both Valentinian Gnosticism and German Idealism, see: Cyril O'Regan, *Gnostic Apocalypse: Jacob Boehme's Haunted Narrative*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2002.

understanding and the yearning together now become a freely creating and all-powerful will and build in the initial anarchy of nature as its own element or instrument.<sup>669</sup>

It is important to note Schelling's use of an alien yearning and. This same theme is narrated within Valentinian cosmology in which, however, this alien yearning is hypostasised as Sophia.

Schelling goes on to argue that because humanity has, at the base of its existence, this same unruly ground, humanity can be said to have 'in relation to God a relatively independent principle within himself.'<sup>670</sup> However, whereas in God, this unruly base has been conquered and brought into a harmonious unity with himself, humanity has this principle as severable from itself, and this fact generates '*the possibility of good and evil.*'<sup>671</sup> Thus, the root of all evil is this unconquered unruly principle that tends to exert itself over the harmony of the whole; a short-sighted and selfish individuality. Although evil takes its origin from the ground of God's existence it is not consciously willed by him (which always tends towards the good); a position that Schelling can uphold given his distinction between the ground of God's existence and his understanding and will. Thus we have two wills in God: the will of the ground to assert itself and the will of God which is a tendency towards love and unity. The latter must emerge out of the former: 'the dark principle had to be as ground so that light could be raised out of it.'<sup>672</sup>

Schelling appeals to a modified conception of the incarnation to explain how the ground in us can be once again overcome and tamed only by God on our behalf:

In order to counter personal and spiritual evil [creaturely evil], the light of the spirit in fact appears likewise in the shape of a human person as a mediator in order to re-establish the rapport between God and creation at the highest level...God must become man so that man may return to God. The possibility of being saved is restored only through the re-established relation of the ground to God.<sup>673</sup>

This agonistic process and the possibility of evil is justified, in the eyes of Schelling, to the extent that it is dialectically necessary. There would be no life and no goodness if the yearning of the ground did not provide the summons for a response to conquer it: 'where there is no struggle

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<sup>669</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (trans: Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt), New York, State University of New York, 2006, p.30.

<sup>670</sup> Ibid, p.32.

<sup>671</sup> Ibid, p.33.

<sup>672</sup> Ibid, p.44.

<sup>673</sup> Ibid, p.46.

there is no life.’<sup>674</sup> Therefore, it is in this sense then that ‘good and evil are the same thing only seen from different sides.’<sup>675</sup> And, when he hypothetically asks himself why the result of this process could not be established from the beginning, he simply responds by affirming that all life (divine and creaturely) entails the necessity of becoming which necessarily involves suffering.<sup>676</sup>

In 1809, Schelling unexpectedly lost his wife Caroline, which had a profound effect on him and on his philosophy.<sup>677</sup> Shortly after his loss, in 1810, Schelling gave a small series of lectures in Stuttgart (*Stuttgart Privatvorlesung*) where he again reaffirms his commitment to the ‘falling away’ thesis to account for finitude and attempts to justify his intimate knowledge of the internal construction of the divine. He states: ‘the true system can never be created but only uncovered as one that is already inherent in itself: that is, *in the divine understanding*.’<sup>678</sup> According to Schelling, the initiation of ‘creation’ is ‘indeed a descent of God; he properly descends into the real, contracts himself entirely into the real.’<sup>679</sup> And this occurs because when God comes to consciousness he does so by ‘separating himself from himself’ e.g. by distinguishing a subject from an object. Thus, this creates the distinction between the unconscious and the conscious, whereby the former is ‘expelled from himself’ with the intention of educating this expelled aspect so it may once again be compatible with himself: ‘all creation, then, involves a soliciting of the superior and properly divine [dimension] within what had been excluded.’<sup>680</sup> This is apparently conceived as a necessary process of the ‘complete coming to consciousness of the complete personalisation of God.’<sup>681</sup> Schelling suggests that beings that have become alienated

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<sup>674</sup> Ibid, p.63.

<sup>675</sup> Ibid.

<sup>676</sup> Ibid, p.66.

<sup>677</sup> For a good and concise account of Schelling’s relationship with Caroline, including the public scandals which he became embroiled in over his insistence on using his own homeopathic theories of medicine (whilst rejecting professional assistance) to heal his wife, which was initially successful, and then again later his step-daughter Auguste (which was not successful) and the effect that these events had on Schelling’s character see: Fiona Steinkamp’s introduction to her translation of Schelling’s novel *Clara*. Although there are disputes over the purpose of *Clara* and the exact dates, the general consensus (given its desire to connect the material world with the spiritual world) is that Schelling is attempting to philosophically ground the existence of his deceased wife and maintain a connection with her. He also shows a strong interest in themes such as clairvoyance which would support this contention. See: F.W.J. Schelling, *Clara, or, On Nature’s Connection with the Spirit World* (trans: Fiona Steinkamp), New York, State University of New York Press, 2002. See, also: Jason Wirth, *The Conspiracy of Life: Meditations on Schelling and his Time*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2003, pp.29-31.

<sup>678</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, ‘The Stuttgart Seminars’, in: Thomas Pfau, *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F.W.J. Schelling*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1994, pp.195-244, p.197.

<sup>679</sup> Ibid, p.204.

<sup>680</sup> Ibid, p.207.

<sup>681</sup> Ibid, p.206.

from the original whole, in this constructive process of the divine, feel a sense of their alienation from a unity and seek to find it once again: ‘free beings...in separation from God...must search for their unity and cannot find it. God can no longer be their unity, and hence they must search for a natural unity that, because it cannot be the true unity of free beings, remains but a temporal and finite bond.’<sup>682</sup> This was a characteristic outlined in the soteriological and eschatological conventions of the Valentinian narrative in chapter II. However, this mutual alienation cannot be sustained: ‘the gap must not remain, for otherwise it would affect God’s very existence.’<sup>683</sup> Following his incarnational conception of the reconciliation between the world and God and the world and man, that he outlined in his essay on *Freedom*, he again propounds that God must enact this reconciliation on our behalf. Many of these themes are revisited with greater detail and much more profundity in Schelling’s famous *Die Weltalter*.

### **The Becoming of God in the Ages of the World.**

The earliest record of Schelling’s initiation of *die Weltalter* was in a diary entry which he made on September 15, 1810, where he announces its beginning.<sup>684</sup> He authored many and various drafts of *die Weltalter*, most notably on – what he intended to be the first book of the entire project - ‘the past.’ Schelling appears to have remained continually dissatisfied with all of his productions. In the 1813 draft, Schelling’s son and editor of his works, notes that his father had attached a note towards the end of the work asking for the remainder of it not to be printed as ‘the treatise falls into utter falsehoods from this point forward.’<sup>685</sup> This long process of dissatisfaction and re-drafting explains why the project was never completed and never came to print in Schelling’s life-time. Jason Wirth has noted that:

in 1939 Horst Fuhrmans discovered in the cellar of the library of the university of Munich a large chest, filled with a disorganised mass of many thousands of folio pages, each crammed with writing from Schelling’s own hand. Among the sheets were...two corrected versions, set but not printed, of the first book of *die Weltalter*, as well as more than twelve quite different handwritten versions of the first book.<sup>686</sup>

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<sup>682</sup> Ibid, pp.226-27.

<sup>683</sup> Ibid, p.237.

<sup>684</sup> See: F.W.J. Schelling, ‘1810 Tagebuch’, in: F.W.J. Schelling, *Die Stuttgarter Privatvorlesung* (ed: Miklos Veto), Turin, Bottega d’Ersasmo, 1973, p.216.

<sup>685</sup> See: Slavoj Žižek, *The Abyss of Freedom*, Michigan, University of Michigan, 2000, p.182.

<sup>686</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World* (ed and trans: Jason Wirth), New York, State University of New York Press, 2000, p.vii.

Unfortunately, all of these were lost during the allied bombing of July 1944. All we have now are the three drafts of, what was intended to be the first book of the project, 1811, 1813, and 1815. I share the judgement of Schelling's son and Jason Wirth, that the 1815 version (or third draft) is the most complete and sustained presentation of the first book, and for this reason I shall utilise it as my principal source for engaging with *die Weltalter*.<sup>687</sup>

There are a variety of conflicting ways of interpreting this work,<sup>688</sup> and despite Schelling's avowal of ignorance in the 1811 draft,<sup>689</sup> in the 1815 version it is quite clear that he is narrating, what he believes to be, the internal becoming of the Absolute; and, moreover, that he is able to do this, in so far as humanity is an aspect of this very becoming itself; we can remember it because there is an 'essence from the beginning of times...drawn from the source of things and akin to it, what is eternal of the soul has a consciousness of creation.'<sup>690</sup>

Schelling contends that necessity and freedom exist in God with the primacy of the former, to the extent that God must necessarily exist before he can be free: 'necessity lies at the foundation of freedom and is in God itself what is first and oldest.'<sup>691</sup> Schelling hypostasises this quasi-independent, yet necessary, aspect of God as his *nature*. He then further identifies two opposing forces at work within God's nature: a force of love and a force of self-assertion (*Egoität*). The

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<sup>687</sup> Ibid, p.viii.

<sup>688</sup> For instance, Walter Schulz argues that Schelling brought German Idealism to its logical conclusion of absolute knowing (see: Walter Schulz, *Die Vollendung des Deutschen Idealismus in der Spätphilosophie Schellings*, Pfullingen, Neshe, 1975). However, Jürgen Habermas – according to Žižek – demonstrates the first 'progressive appropriation of Schelling that interprets *Weltalter* as a break with the German Idealist logic of the Absolute, introducing the motif of radical historicity and contingency' (Slavoj Žižek, *The Abyss of Freedom*, Michigan, University of Michigan, 2000, p.87; see also: Jürgen Habermas, 'Dialektischer Idealismus im Übergang zum Materialismus: Geschichtsphilosophie Folgerungen aus Schellings Idee einer Contraction Gottes', Berlin, Luchterland, 1969, pp.108-61). Following a similar line of interpretation, Manfred Frank suggests that the work anticipates later philosophical movements such as existentialism (see: Manfred Frank, *Der unendliche Mangel an Sein: Schellings Hegelkritik und die Anfänge der Marxschen Dialektik*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1975). Whereas, Henrich Heine suggests that the religious themes of the *Weltalter* were outlined as early as *Philosophie und Religion*, from which 'philosophy stops with Herr Schelling, and poetry, that is to say folly begins' (see: Henrich Heine, *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland*, Halle. Otto Händel, 1887, pp.117-18).

<sup>689</sup> Schelling states that: 'I would like to take this opportunity to say...what I so often felt, and in an especially lively way with this present presentation: how much nearer I am than most people could probably conceive to this growing silent of knowledge which we must necessarily encounter when we know how infinitely far everything that is personal reaches such that it is impossible actually to know anything at all' (Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p.xxvii).

<sup>690</sup> Ibid,p.114. Hegel makes very similar claims in his 1812 *Logic* where he describes the science as 'truth as it is without veil and in its absolute nature. It can therefore be said that this content is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and the finite mind' (G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of logic* (trans: A.V. Miller), Prometheus, 1999, p.50); seemingly, the natural conclusion from the end of the *Phenomenology*.

<sup>691</sup> Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p.5.

force of love can have no being '*for itself*' in so far as its very nature is to be outstretching and for an other. However, this is opposed by its own ground of being which is nothing other than itself (as the necessary being). This force is seen as a necessary preliminary to the force of love realising itself *for itself*: 'two principles are already in what is necessary for God: the outpouring, outstretching, self-giving being, and an equivalently eternal force of selfhood, of retreat into itself, of being in itself.'<sup>692</sup> Despite this proposal implying an obvious challenge to divine unity, Schelling argues that it is essentially no different from 'person x' being angry in the morning and gentle in the afternoon, person x is the same person in both instances.<sup>693</sup> He then suggests that a dialectical struggle ensues within the nature of God between the self-assertive force and the loving force; both mutually negating each other.<sup>694</sup> This then generates a third force within God's nature, that is the resolution of the opposing powers, thus:

God, in accordance with the necessity of his nature, is an eternal no, the highest being-in-itself, an eternal withdrawing of its being in to itself... But the same God, with equal necessity of its nature, although not in accord with the same principle, but in accord with a principle that is completely different from the first principle, is the eternal yes, an eternal outstretching, giving and communicating of its being. Each of these principles, in an entirely equal fashion... has the same claim to be God... yet they reciprocally exclude each other... But in an equally eternal manner, God is the *third term* or the *unity* of the yes and the no.<sup>695</sup>

According to Schelling these 'three potencies/powers' are constantly striving for the priority of their being. However, their taxonomy is apparently established by an 'unconscious' (eternally presupposed) decision (*Entscheidung*).<sup>696</sup> The first power (A<sub>1</sub>) is the force of self-assertion, the force to be *in itself*: 'what is altogether first in God... is that God restricts itself, denies itself, withdraws its essence from the outside and retreats into itself.'<sup>697</sup> According to Schelling, this negating force reflexively posits the second potency (A<sub>2</sub>): 'a being cannot negate itself as actual without at the same time positing oneself as the actualising potency'<sup>698</sup> which is the potency to communicate its being out of love. These two forces threaten to negate the unity of God, however, this is impossible: 'hence, facilitated by the eternal necessity through the force of indissoluble life, they [A<sub>1</sub> and A<sub>2</sub>] posit outside and above themselves a *third*, which is the unity

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<sup>692</sup> Ibid, p.7.

<sup>693</sup> Ibid, p.8.

<sup>694</sup> Ibid, p.9.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid, p.11 (my emphasis).

<sup>696</sup> Ibid, p.13.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid, p.17.

<sup>698</sup> Ibid.

[A<sub>3</sub>].<sup>699</sup> The third potency is the eternal end of the dialectic, just as the first potency was the eternal beginning. However, because each of the three potencies has an integral right to be, they all vie to assert themselves as the dominant force, and thus the dialectic rotates cyclically in eternity on a loop. Schelling contends that this cycle is ‘not a true existence but only an eternal drive and zeal to be, *without actual being*.’<sup>700</sup> It is clear that actuality cannot arise out of this eternal process of vying to be actual, to reveal itself, there needs to be a separation (*Scheidung*) from this process from something utterly outside of it: ‘liberation...can only come through an Other that is outside of it and wholly independent of it.’<sup>701</sup> However, because of its distinction from what is ‘necessary’ in God (e.g. his nature), this Other, if it exists, cannot exist necessarily to the extent that it is not related to what is necessary in God; and since there is no conception of something being freely actual in God, we are left with the position that it is a possibility ‘the eternal freedom to be.’<sup>702</sup> Schelling describes this possibility as a ‘pure will;’ a will which desires no object. This Other is related to God’s nature in so far as its mere possibility rouses the potencies in God to seek a harmony with this pure will:

In that eternally commencing life there lies the wish to escape from the involuntary movement and from the distress of pining. And through its simple presence, without any movement, that which is higher...rouses in that life [of necessity] the yearning for freedom. The obsession abates into yearning, wild desire turns into a yearning to ally itself...with that will that wills nothing [the Other, the pure will], with eternal freedom.<sup>703</sup>

Now, what was initially a will to self-revelation by each of the three potencies, is now converted into a yearning for unity and submission to the possibility of being freely actual: ‘by virtue of an eternal wanting or decision. It [what is necessary in God] eternally and inseparably allies itself to the highest as its immediate subject and becomes its unwavering Being [or the ground of its actuality], its abiding substratum.’<sup>704</sup> However, this conversion leaves a waste product from the nature of God which is extradited, as it were, out of God’s nature: ‘each potency is transformed into the relationship of the totality...Therefore, that blind, necessary being which strove to be the One and which nonetheless could not be it, is debased to the All.’<sup>705</sup> This has strong parallels in

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<sup>699</sup> Ibid, p.19.

<sup>700</sup> Ibid, p.22.

<sup>701</sup> Ibid, p.23.

<sup>702</sup> Ibid.

<sup>703</sup> Ibid, pp.27-28.

<sup>704</sup> Ibid, p.29.

<sup>705</sup> Ibid.

Valentinian Gnosticism which narrates Sophia's desire or yearning to achieve something which was not possible for her to achieve (to know and be united with *Bythus*). This desire is later overcome through 'external aid' but the consequence of her desire (*Achamoth*) must be expelled from the Pleroma and, in doing so, generates finite material existence 'outside' of the totality. This is precisely what happens to the yearning of God's nature in Schelling's conception; he even utilises Gnostic images to explain this proposal: 'this entrance of yearning into the eternal nature marks a new moment... This is that moment that the intimating primal world marked as the *splitting apart of the world egg*... that moment in which the earthly and the heavenly first divided.'<sup>706</sup> Schelling is clearly alluding to ancient Greek creation myths. His mentioning of the 'world egg' is most likely a direct reference to the Orphite creation myth, although his emphasis on the primal split of an original totality through the introduction of an alien desire within the whole itself, is perhaps better understood in light of Valentinian Gnosticism.<sup>707</sup>

During this process of transition to the realisation of the free actuality of the whole via the subordination of God's nature to the higher principle, the Other, 'the highest potency of eternal nature, what within it is free and akin to spirit ( $A_3$ ), is elevated to the immediate subject of pure Godhead. But the two other potencies, which equally were primordial beginnings, become only a condition and... the way to this highest potency'<sup>708</sup> and these other two potencies become the 'prime matter' of everything other than the divine subject or the 'divine exterior.' Thus,  $A_1$  becomes the basis for nature as we experience it: 'the original negation is still the mother... of the entire world that is visible to us.'<sup>709</sup>  $A_2$  becomes the substratum of the spiritual world which is in closer proximity to the divine. Whereas  $A_3$ : 'Is that universal soul by which the cosmos is ensouled, the soul which through the immediate relationship to the Godhead is now level-headed and in control of itself. It is the eternal link between nature and the spiritual world as well as between the world and God.'<sup>710</sup>

Schelling insists that although this language implies temporal succession within the divine, the process itself was never incomplete; it is eternally completed; the succession is in eternity itself:

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<sup>706</sup> Ibid, p.28.

<sup>707</sup> For an account of the Ophite creation myth, see: W.K.C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, New Jersey, Princeton, 1993.

<sup>708</sup> Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p.29.

<sup>709</sup> Ibid, p.30.

<sup>710</sup> Ibid, p.37.



God can never come to have being. God has being from eternity. But what follows from this? Nothing but that the cision likewise happened from eternity...on account of the supernatural being of freedom, the primordial state of the contradiction, that wild fire, that life of obsession and craving, is posited as the past...as an eternal past, as a past that did not first become past, but which was the past from the primordial beginning and since all eternity.<sup>711</sup>

In typical Idealist fashion Schelling upholds that consciousness can only arise through a juxtaposition to something which is other than itself; in God himself this other something is the past in God (or the unconscious principle):

All consciousness is grounded on the unconscious and precisely in the dawning of consciousness the unconscious is posited as the past of consciousness. Now it is certainly not thinkable that God was unconscious for a while and then became conscious. But it is certainly thinkable that in the same inseparable act of the dawning of consciousness the unconscious and the conscious of God were grasped at the same time. The conscious was grasped as the eternally present but the unconscious was grasped with the ascertainment of what is eternally past.<sup>712</sup>

Schelling believes that he has here ‘described the eternal life of the Godhead.’<sup>713</sup>

Therefore, Schelling has adhered to the conventions of Valentinian Gnosticism in his attempts to explain the problem of finitude that he inherited from Fichte, and which was here the product of an expelled yearning within God’s nature. After *die Weltalter* and with Hegel’s rise to prominence, Schelling turns his attention to the state of philosophy as he finds it, and his dissatisfaction, and subsequent critique of his old friend Hegel proves pivotal in his later philosophical endeavours, which we shall now explore.

## **The Late Philosophy**

### **Negative and Positive Philosophy and the Road to the Philosophy of Revelation.**

Hegel died in 1831, leaving his prestigious chair in Berlin vacant. The initial legacy of Hegelian thought in Germany was received in a variety of ways. By and large, Hegel had left a whole host of orthodox disciples who intended to uphold, defend, and evangelise the philosophical world with the ‘absolute system.’ However, there were also religious conservatives who had been left disturbed by Hegel’s treatment of religion and its apparent implication of pantheism (religious conservatism seems to be the motive behind King Wilhelm IV pushing for Schelling to replace

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<sup>711</sup> Ibid, p.38.

<sup>712</sup> Ibid, p.44.

<sup>713</sup> Ibid, p.49.

Hegel in Berlin ‘to counter the Hegelian spread’ as it were). Other philosophers had been left with a feeling of absence; a considerable lack of wonder, freedom and excitement in philosophising, which had been replaced by the rigorousness and completeness of Hegel’s system. For instance, Goethe, as early as 1812, had written of his disgust of Hegel’s system, describing it as a ‘miserable sophistical joke.’<sup>714</sup>

Schelling was officially appointed to occupy the vacant Berlin chair in 1840. This decision was rather peculiar in many respects; after all, Schelling had published nothing significant since his essay on human freedom in 1809, he had slipped off the radar somewhat during his ‘quiet years’ from around about the period just after the early 1820’s. On paper, Schelling did not appear to be a standout applicant. Significantly, however, it seems that Schelling had shaped his response to Hegel during these quiet years; offering some important lectures whilst at the university of Munich, where he first began to explicitly formulate his critique of Hegel, which was published by Victor Cousin in 1834.<sup>715</sup> Perhaps, therefore, the attraction of Schelling’s philosophy, in the eyes of his would be employers, was in its critical stance towards Hegelian thought, which was disliked by a considerable amount of influential hierarchs in Berlin (as we have just mentioned, King Wilhelm IV being, perhaps the most significant). Schelling’s appointment was met with mixed reactions. The ‘young Hegelians’ saw this as a repressive move by religious conservatives. Friedrich Engels described Schelling’s philosophy as ‘just bits of nonsense which existed only in Schelling’s head and laid no claims whatever to any influence on the external world.’<sup>716</sup> He would later release a pamphlet in an attempt to discredit Schelling’s thought and as a direct protest to him being appointed, despite attending his lectures himself.<sup>717</sup> Others anticipated Schelling with great excitement. For instance, the Russian anarchist philosopher Mikhail Bakunin was once the somewhat unlikely source of these gushing reports on Schelling, which were contained in an 1841 letter to his family: ‘you cannot imagine with what impatience I have been waiting for Schelling’s lectures...I have read much of his works and

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<sup>714</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive philosophy (Berlin Lectures)*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2007, p.12.

<sup>715</sup> Schelling had explicitly begun to outline, what would develop into his critique of Hegel in his 1827/28 Munich lectures, when he first proposed the limits of ‘negative philosophy.’ See: F.W.J. Schelling, *System der Weltalter: Münchener Vorlesung 1827/28 in einer Nachschrift von Ernst von Lasaulx*, Frankfurt, Vittorio Klostermann, 1990, p.85.

<sup>716</sup> Terrell Carver, *Engels*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1981, p.8.

<sup>717</sup> See: Friedrich Engels, *Schelling und die Offenbarung: Kritik des neuesten Reaktionsversuchs gegen die Freier Philosophie* (1842).

found there in such an immeasurable profundity of life and creative thinking that I am convinced he will now reveal to us the treasure of meaning.<sup>718</sup> Similarly, a young Søren Kierkegaard (also an attendant of the lectures) wrote: I am so thrilled to have heard Schelling's second lecture – indescribable...I have now placed all my hope in Schelling.<sup>719</sup>

Schelling's critique of Hegel is a crucial part of his later philosophy; his attempts to 'get beyond Hegel' shape the majority of the content of his late philosophy. Although they are sporadically distributed in Schelling's writings, the core of his critique of Hegel is formulated in his 1833/34 lectures entitled *Zur Geschichte der neueren Philosophie*.<sup>720</sup>

Schelling's most prominent criticism of Hegel's philosophy is that it apparently depends on an argument in logic that is similar to the one found in the 'ontological proof of God' in accounting for the *reality* of the first principle of his system. According to Hegel, his logic begins with *Being or pure being* which is utterly indeterminate.<sup>721</sup> However, for Schelling pure being is nothing but a pure abstraction from real being; a mere concept that necessarily has no basis in reality: 'it is an impossibility to think being in general...being is rather necessarily and at all times something determinate.'<sup>722</sup> Thus, Schelling equates pure being with a vacuous nothing (*Nichts*). Ironically, this appears to be something that Hegel already does himself, to the extent that 'Nothing' is an absence of any determination which makes it identical with pure being: 'pure being and pure nothing are, therefore, the same.'<sup>723</sup> However, Schelling thinks that Hegel cannot really be implying that pure being is an absolute absence, otherwise he would have stated nothing at all as his first principle: 'it cannot be his intention to declare pure being to be an *Ungedanken*, after he had just declared it to be the absolutely first thought.'<sup>724</sup> From the identity of pure being and nothing Hegel produces the notion of 'becoming.' However, Schelling suggests that this is smuggled in to the equation through a rhetorical sleight of hand. For, pure being cannot be pure being if it is only 'not yet nothing' (this introduction of the 'not yet' is the only way that Hegel can produce the concept of becoming, according to Schelling) this simply

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<sup>718</sup> Mikhail Bakunin, *Sobranie Socinenis I Pisem 1828-1876*, cited in: F.W.J. Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive philosophy (Berlin Lectures)*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2007, p.13.

<sup>719</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Die Tægebüher I*, Duseldorf, 1962, p.273; cited in: F.W.J. Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive philosophy (Berlin Lectures)*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2007, p.13.

<sup>720</sup> Sometimes dated slightly later in 1836/37.

<sup>721</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (1812) (trans: A.V. Miller), New York, Prometheus, 1999, p.82.

<sup>722</sup> Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, p.139.

<sup>723</sup> Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (1812), p.82.

<sup>724</sup> Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, p.140.

implies that pure being is actually a mere concept of a possibility and therefore a determinate being after all. Schelling reformulates Hegel's proposition to read thus:

One ought rather to say that it is the transition from nothing, from not yet being, to real being, so that, in becoming, nothing and being are not united but instead *nothing* is left behind. However, Hegel loves this inexact way of expressing himself; but that way the most trivial things can be given the appearance of something extraordinary.<sup>725</sup>

Schelling further argues that Hegel's logic is nothing more than an abstract concept or form. Thus, at best, all it can do is demonstrate how something must be (its form) once it is in existence; it is not at liberty to be able to demonstrate reality per se: 'the in itself of a geometrical figure remains the same whether or not it exists.'<sup>726</sup> However, according to Schelling, this is precisely what Hegel attempts to do; derive reality from a simple concept and thus restates the 'fallacy' of the 'ontological proof': 'the old metaphysics, which was built up out of various sciences, had as its universal basis a science which also had *concepts only as concepts as its content*: ontology. In his *Logic* Hegel had nothing in mind but this ontology.'<sup>727</sup>

In a markedly modern 'postmodern' critique of Hegel, Schelling implies the necessity of introducing reason to alterity so that it does not become narcissistically infatuated with itself which here has resulted in the 'absolutisation' of contingent truths:

This is the pretension to complete systemisation...the claim that all concepts have been included and that outside the circle of those that have been included no other concept is possible...But what if concepts can be shown which that system knows nothing about...*or has only taken up the ones it has done in the sense in which they are compatible with the system once the system has been presupposed.*<sup>728</sup>

According to Schelling, Hegel absolutises contingent truths by abstracting concepts taken from reality, however, 'abstractions cannot...be taken for reality before that from which they are abstracted; becoming cannot be there before something becomes, existence not before something exists.'<sup>729</sup> In other words, Hegel presupposes that which he seeks to ground (this is precisely why it mimics the ontological proof of God), Schelling puts this excellently when stating that: 'the

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<sup>725</sup> Ibid, p.141.

<sup>726</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive philosophy (Berlin Lectures)*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2007, p.130.

<sup>727</sup> Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, p.143.

<sup>728</sup> Ibid, p.144. Andrew Bowie suggest that 'Schelling already makes certain of the philosophical moves necessary for a postmodern or post-metaphysical perspective' (Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: an Introduction*, London, Routledge, 1993, p.139).

<sup>729</sup> Schelling, *On the History of Modern*, p.145.

whole world lies, so to speak, in the nets of the understanding or of reason, but the question is *how* exactly it got into those nets, since there is obviously something other and something more than mere reason in the world.’<sup>730</sup>

Schelling is keen to point out that he is not simply critiquing Hegel’s logic on account that it provides no reality in sense-perception, but rather that the *object* of these logical concepts must have a reality ‘outside’ of the concepts themselves, which need not be just in sense perception, which is the locus for Schelling’s *theological* critique of Hegel (e.g. God a ‘reality’ which is neither a pure concept or an object in intuition). Schelling states:

Hegel thinks the only objection to or criticism of the idea of his *Logic* are that these thoughts are only thoughts, because the true content is supposed to be in sensuous perception...But it is not a question of that...the fact that the content of philosophy is only thoughts cannot be criticised, but rather that the *object* of these thoughts is only the concept.<sup>731</sup>

Thus, Schelling thinks that it is aimlessly tautological: ‘*eine Wissenschaft die die Begriffe nur als Begriffe zum Inhalt hatte.*’<sup>732</sup> This tension between concept and reality comes sharply in to focus when Hegel attempts to account for the reality of nature, according to Schelling. Given the Absolute is the completed idea, Hegel is forced to narrate a ‘double becoming’ of the Absolute, where he suggests that reality and nature ‘fall out’ of the concept,<sup>733</sup> seemingly for no apparent reason other than the fact that reality and nature exist and therefore need to be accounted for within the concept (however awkward and inconvenient this may appear):

In the Idea there is no necessity at all for any kind of movement. The idea could not, for instance, progress further in itself, but would rather have completely to break away from itself...if it is assumed [reality]...then it is not assumed because of a necessity in the Idea itself, but simply because nature happens to exist...Hegel must come to reality. But in the idea itself there is, then, no necessity at all for progression or becoming other.<sup>734</sup>

And, according to Schelling, even if one were to grant Hegel the *Abfall* of his concept into nature, one would still have to question its reality; for there appears to be no ‘outside’ of the concept that is not already inherently a part of the concept itself; William Desmond phrases it

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<sup>730</sup> Ibid, p.147.

<sup>731</sup> Ibid, p.146.

<sup>732</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung* (1841/42) (ed: Manfred Frank), Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1977, p.128.

<sup>733</sup> ‘*Schon vor diesen hatte er die Natur als einen Abfall von der Idee bezeichnet*’ (Ibid, p.131).

<sup>734</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy* (trans: Andrew Bowie), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.154.

thus: ‘every move “outside” thought is only a quasi-move; for the “outside” is again the “inside.”’<sup>735</sup> Schelling elucidates this point brilliantly when he states:

In this [the Hegelian process] alone nothing else occurs save thinking; it is not a real process that develops here, but rather just a logical one; the being into which the potency passes over is a being that itself belongs to the concept and, thus, is only a being in the concept, not outside it.<sup>736</sup>

Thus, for Schelling, Hegelian philosophy marks out the limits of a particular type of philosophising, which he designates as ‘negative philosophy.’ Negative philosophy is essentially the rigorous demonstration of the logical form of all existence that is fashioned *a priori*. It is important to note that Schelling does not consider negative philosophy opprobrious in itself, but rather as the necessary preliminary to what he will later define as the ‘positive philosophy.’ He believes that the exhaustion of negative philosophising in fact points towards the need for a positive philosophy: ‘precisely because what the science of reason comprehends *a priori* – or construes is being – it is vital for it to have a control through which it can *demonstrate* that what it has found *a priori* [e.g. in the concept] is *not a chimera*.’<sup>737</sup> This is exactly what Schelling believes Hegelian philosophy is unable to do; unable to get outside of the confines of its own logic and that is why he conceives it as the culmination of the negative project, although Schelling appears unwilling to even confer this status upon Hegel: ‘I [did not] consider the Hegelian philosophy to be the negative. I am not able to inflict this honour upon it... Since, on the contrary, its fundamental error consists precisely in that it wants to be positive... the philosophy that Hegel presented is the negative driven beyond its limits.’<sup>738</sup> Schelling contends that, within Hegel’s system, the Absolute or God is robbed ‘of all transcendence and draws him into this logical thinking, into a merely logical concept into an idea itself.’<sup>739</sup> Therefore, if negative philosophy points towards the necessity of an accompanying positive philosophy, what will this philosophy look like?

According to Schelling, the positive philosophy must seek to independently confirm the findings of the negative philosophy by means of proving its *reality*. Thus, it must necessarily begin with the sheer facticity of Being and reality and seek to demonstrate the reality of the

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<sup>735</sup> William Desmond, *Hegel’s God: A Counterfeit Double?*, Burlington, Ashgate, 2003, p.121.

<sup>736</sup> Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive philosophy*, p.134.

<sup>737</sup> Ibid, p.131.

<sup>738</sup> Ibid, p.145.

<sup>739</sup> Ibid, p.138.

negative concepts through *experience (Erfahrung)*: ‘for only experience, and not reason, can say that, that which has been construed really exists.’<sup>740</sup> And, therefore it must simply accept the actuality of Being and commence with that fact, for any assessment of a mere possibility will regress into negative philosophy: ‘*So muß ich vom Prius ausgehen, vom Sein; das ist aber nicht möglich, ohne von vorn, einer neue Wissenschaft, anzufangen. Jetzt haben wir den Anfang der Philosophie gefunden.*’<sup>741</sup> The crucial distinction therefore, according to Schelling, is that, whereas negative philosophy deduces reality from an *a priori concept*, the positive philosophy begins with reality and seeks to prove the *a priori concept* via experience, thus the *a priori* is proposed and then proved *a posteriori* in the positive philosophy. However, what exactly must Schelling prove in the positive philosophy? Essentially, he wants to prove the existence of God that was attained in the negative philosophy. However, he is quite clear that he cannot prove this *a priori*; for the positive philosophy must simply assume the facticity of Being as being this *prius* which is necessarily outside of the concept and therefore outside of reason itself which he comes to call the *Umgekehrte Idee*, the inverted idea: ‘that which just *is* is being from which...every idea...every potency is excluded. We will, thus, only be able to call it the inverted idea the idea in which *reason is set outside itself*.’<sup>742</sup> Schelling is emphatic that this absolute *prius* cannot be proved (for it is the *condition* of the possibility of thinking per se). Thus, Schelling believes that he can only prove the consequences of this *prius*: what the consequences are that follow from this, these must be factually proved, and only thereby do we prove the divinity of that *prius*- that is God, and that God therefore exists.<sup>743</sup> Therefore, the concept of divinity attained within the negative philosophy must be demonstrated, in reality and therefore from experience, to apply to that which cannot be proved; the sheer facticity of being or the ‘*Unvordenkliche Sein*,’ that is the ‘unprethinkable being.’<sup>744</sup> Thus, the task of positive philosophy is therefore something akin to an ‘empirical metaphysics’ which is, according to Schelling, the only possible type of metaphysics post-Kant, which must culminate in a philosophical religion:

Kant forbade metaphysics’ transcendence, but he forbade it only for dogmatizing reason, that is, for reason that of itself seeks, by means of inferences, to reach existence; he did not forbid

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<sup>740</sup> Ibid, p.131.

<sup>741</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung (1841/42)*, p.155.

<sup>742</sup> Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive philosophy (Berlin Lectures)*, p.203.

<sup>743</sup> Ibid, p.180.

<sup>744</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung (1841/42)*, p.161.

reason to proceed conversely from that which simply and, thus, infinitely exists to the concept of the most supreme being as *posterius*.<sup>745</sup>

Therefore, the method of the positive philosophy marks the initiation and direction of Schelling's late philosophy. Before going on to evaluate his last proposals, it is important to note that many regard Schelling's method as hopelessly flawed and that the philosophical religion (or Schelling's theology) which he will seek to establish on its foundation, is doomed to failure before it has even begun.<sup>746</sup> The most obvious critique of Schelling's method is that it simply leaves him vulnerable to the same fundamental critiques that he levelled against Hegel, and as we shall see, there is a strong tendency for Schelling's proof to simply be an exercise in forcing 'the facts to fit the thesis', as it were, in, what is essentially, an inverted version of what Hegel did when he made reality conform to the *a priori* concept. However, despite this criticism, Schelling's critique of Hegel still appears relevant, even if he was unable to 'get beyond Hegel' himself.

The obvious Hegelian response to Schelling's criticisms is that any attempt to get beyond thought or the concept, is simply impossible, for the very notion of an 'unprethinkable being' could not even be posited as an idea unless it were already somehow available to thought. This basic contention is part of Hegel's reinterpretation and re-appropriation of the 'ontological proof' of God. Whereas Kant had sought to identify a definitive distinction between concept and reality (where the mere identity of the former could not necessarily include the latter),<sup>747</sup> Hegel affirms that the concept necessarily includes being in itself:

Being is supposed to be distinct from the concept. We believe that we can regard the concept as strictly subjective, as finite; but the characteristic of being is in the concept itself. The finitude of subjectivity is sublated in the concept itself, and the unity of being and concept is not a presupposition vis-à-vis the concept, against which it is measured.<sup>748</sup>

Therefore, there can be no Being beyond or separate from the concept within this form of reasoning. However, according to Schelling, we must uphold that the *condition* of all thinking

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<sup>745</sup> Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive philosophy (Berlin Lectures)*, p.208-9.

<sup>746</sup> Even Bowie concedes this point stating that the method: 'invalidates any chance of the later philosophy succeeding as theology' (Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: an Introduction*, London, Routledge, 1993, p.166). See also on this point: John Burbidge, *Hegel on Logic and Reason: The Reasonableness of Christianity*, New York, State University of New York, 1992, pp.55-71.

<sup>747</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B627.

<sup>748</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion III* (trans: Peter Hodgson), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p.355.



cannot itself be an *aspect* of it, this would be tautological; it would amount to the possibility of the infant being able to articulate itself before having learned its first language; the articulation can only occur *once* the language has been learned and this origin cannot be within the language itself, it must be presupposed as an apparatus which has simply been given. However, the sheer ‘givenness’ of the language can be articulated without necessarily encompassing its own origin or the total comprehension of the giver, which appears to be the point that Schelling is making.

Before Schelling attempts to construct his positive philosophy he embarks on the task of constructing his own negative philosophy which he proposes in his *Philosophy of Mythology* (Berlin lectures).

### **Schelling’s Negative Philosophy: The Philosophy of Mythology.**

One of the most notable aspects of Schelling’s later philosophy is the esteem in which he holds mythology, despite conceding that it is essentially a human projection. However, what distinguishes him from other adherents to this or a similar theory (such as Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872)), is that these projections themselves are revelatory of a divine providence progressively unfolding within history; as Edward Allen Beach notes: ‘Schelling’s purpose is to demonstrate that these very projections themselves and the processes by which they unfold in human experience may be factors in the revelation of a divine providence.’<sup>749</sup>

The early lectures are essentially discussing the study of mythology itself, where Schelling queries previous hypotheses proposed by thinkers such as Gottfried Hermann (1772-1848)<sup>750</sup> and David Hume (1711-1776).<sup>751</sup> The initiation of Schelling’s own contributions to the subject assume, in line with his empirical method, the fact of mythology itself as an historical occurrence, but very quickly lapse into, what can only be described as at best dubious anthropology. Schelling suggests that mythology has not been ‘invented’ by individual acts of genius (e.g. Homer or Hesiod) but, rather ‘has proceeded from the people itself. The mythology of a people is bound up with its life and essence in such a way that it could only proceed from

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<sup>749</sup> Edward Allen Beach, *The Potencies of God: Schelling’s Philosophy of Mythology*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1994, p.246.

<sup>750</sup> Hermann, in his *On the Essence and Treatment of Mythology*, had suggested that the gods of classic mythology were merely hypostasised presentations of natural phenomena.

<sup>751</sup> Hume had suggested that polytheism has preceded monotheism in his 1757 *Natural History of Religion*.

out of the people.<sup>752</sup> Then with a substantial amount of speculative presumptuousness, Schelling concludes from this observation that humanity must have originally been held together by a single universal spiritual connection, apparently revealed in the very act of the *communal production* of mythology.<sup>753</sup> Significantly, he claims that mythology informs history as opposed to history producing various mythologies. If this is the case, Schelling believes that this primal unity of humanity could have only been produced out of a common belief in monotheism, which therefore becomes the ‘historical presupposition of mythology.’<sup>754</sup> However, given the ‘later’ phenomena of polytheism, and that mythology is indicative of the historical circumstances of the peoples that produce it, this would imply that the primal unity of humanity had been severed. Thus, Schelling’s proposed homogenous humanity that shared a common universal culture and language was disrupted by a ‘spiritual crisis’ that resulted in the generation of polytheism, various languages and cultures, and the reality of ‘peoples’ (e.g. nations): ‘a spiritual crisis in the interior of man had to precede the emergence of peoples’<sup>755</sup> and ‘the emerging polytheism was the cause of the separation of the peoples.’<sup>756</sup> Fundamentally, Schelling is describing a ‘tower of Babel’ like event. Therefore, there was an apparent unity of humankind that was officiated by ‘a principle – which gave space in consciousness to no other except itself – can only have been an infinite one, only a God which entirely filled consciousness, *which was common to all mankind*, a God that...pulled them into its own unity.’<sup>757</sup> However, the emergence of polytheism indicates the splitting up of this unity, which is described as a ‘crisis’: ‘polytheism is the means of the cision that was hurled into the homogenous humanity.’<sup>758</sup>

Schelling then turns his attention to assessing the nature of this original monotheistic God. He claims that it may not be the ‘actual’ Absolute one ‘in itself,’ for the mythological process does not require it to be such, but, rather, only that for *that particular humanity*, or in appearance, this One presented itself as an Absolute; Schelling thus distinguishes ‘absolute monotheism’ from a ‘relative monotheism.’<sup>759</sup> The relative monotheistic deity bares strong resemblances to the

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<sup>752</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* (trans: Mason Richey and Markus Zisselsberger), New York, State University of New York Press, 2007, p.45.

<sup>753</sup> Ibid, p.46.

<sup>754</sup> Ibid, p.66.

<sup>755</sup> Ibid, p.74.

<sup>756</sup> Ibid, p.67.

<sup>757</sup> Ibid, p.75.

<sup>758</sup> Ibid, p.76.

<sup>759</sup> Ibid, p.90.

Valentinian demiurge; a god posing as the Absolute but destined for redundancy once the primal unity has been re-established. Schelling describes the cision, or what he calls the emergence of the second phase of mythology (polytheism), as consisting of an almost violent process of transition where the God posing as the Absolute is revealed as an imposter and the ensuing struggle generates the polytheistic epoch: ‘the heretofore immutable God [A], as soon as he is required to accept determinations from a second, cannot remain the same, and in the unavoidable conflict with this second God cannot avoid proceeding from figure to figure’ in an attempt to re-assert its primacy.<sup>760</sup> Schelling illustrates this point through the dramatic struggles of *Uranus*, *Kronos*, and *Zeus*. The appearance of the second God and the polytheistic process reveals ‘God A’ to be nothing more than ‘the first potency of polytheism.’<sup>761</sup> The significance of the appearance of the second epoch reveals that humanity is in fact alienated from the true and actual monotheistic God and points towards the possibility of this process leading towards his revelation, which presupposes the overturning of the demiurge, and the mythological process itself, which is the ground of the revelation of the true God: ‘revelation only occurs where some type of darkness is broken through; thus it presupposes a darkening, something that has stepped between consciousness and the God who is supposed to reveal himself.’<sup>762</sup> However, Schelling contends that this cision or fall from divine unity is not directly accessible to human consciousness as it is a ‘pre-historical’ or ‘supra-historical’ event.<sup>763</sup> Furthermore, this process itself or ‘the history of the gods’ is apparently the ground and process of the ‘actual becoming of God in consciousness.’<sup>764</sup>

Schelling then goes on to offer a ‘mystical’ reading of this entire process, which narrates the original place of humanity within the unity of the Godhead (here something like a Pleroma) which is then disturbed, resulting in humanity being dislodged from its primary position to a peripheral and external realm, where there is the vague reminiscences of its previous state, which is expressed through the mythological projection of a realm of gods, which is only sublated when humanity returns to its primal position in the divine unity:

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<sup>760</sup> Ibid, pp.92-93.

<sup>761</sup> Ibid, p.119.

<sup>762</sup> Ibid, p.125.

<sup>763</sup> Ibid, p.133.

<sup>764</sup> Ibid, p.137.

We must proceed from...a Being of man in the divine unity. Man is created in the centre of the Godhead...As long as he finds himself in this centre he sees things as they are in God, not in the spiritless and unityless externality of the usual seeing...[However] as soon as man has moved away from this middle point and has removed himself, the periphery leads him astray, and that divine unity is confused...However as man intends to return to his central position...there emerges that middle world, which we name a world of the gods, out of the striving and fighting to hang on to the original divine unity in that which is already disturbed and diverged, that world of the gods that is as it were the dream of a higher existence...after he has sunk from that higher existence...[which] persists up to the final awakening...a return to the primordial Being [Urseyn].<sup>765</sup>

Schelling further contends that the causes and objects which are generated within the mythological process, are, in fact, the potencies within God which agonistically construct his self-consciousness. Mythology therefore becomes the outward display of the mutual interplay of these powers within history moving towards God's self-consciousness, which can only be finalised through history itself. Thus, there is yet again, Schelling's use of Valentinian cosmology to attempt to overcome the problem of finitude.<sup>766</sup> There is a primal unity which is split up internally through an alien force or desire that results in externality, finitude, and a falling away from this ideal. History then becomes the means by which that which is external to God is re-absorbed back into the Absolute and the problem of finitude is resolved; thus he describes the mythological process as a path to 'reunification' and self-restoring,' which has, as its presupposition, 'the estrangement from the divine self'<sup>767</sup> which culminates in 'the restoration of the sublated unity.'<sup>768</sup> When viewed in this light, no particular mythology is considered true, but only the entirety of the process itself, which is slowly moving towards the final stage of reunification which Schelling believes is first realised through Christianity: 'the true God...the entrance to whom is first opened up by Christianity.'<sup>769</sup> Put simply, the whole mythological process has been moving towards the construction of Christianity or the possibility of the philosophy of revelation which has Jesus Christ as its culmination and therefore the completion

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<sup>765</sup> Ibid, pp.143-144.

<sup>766</sup> Hegel outlines an almost identical mythological narrative in his theological interpretation of his Triune Logic (G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion III* (trans: Peter Hodgson), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p.272), which he also suggests 'arose especially among the heretics, indeed primarily among the Gnostics' (Ibid, p.287). Similarly, he also notes that the foundations of Gnostic mythology are to 'specify and to grasp as something concrete what has being in and for itself' (G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy II* (trans: Robert Brown), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, p.329); needless to say, very similar to Hegel's own ambitions in his Logic.

<sup>767</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* (trans: Mason Richey and Markus Zisselsberger), New York, State University of New York Press, 2007, pp.146-147.

<sup>768</sup> Ibid, p.150.

<sup>769</sup> Ibid, p.148.

of the historical process leading towards God's self-consciousness and the re-absorption of that which was alienated from God, in finitude, with God himself: 'Christ in his appearance is therefore precisely the end of revelation because he removes this being that alienates from God.'<sup>770</sup> As has been noted, the mythological process and the philosophy of mythology are meant to culminate in the philosophy of revelation.

### **The Positive Philosophy: The Philosophy of Revelation.**

In his 1841/42 Berlin lectures entitled *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, Schelling attempts to construct the positive philosophy of revelation which was set to accompany and conclude the negative philosophy which he outlined in the mythological process of world history. For Schelling, working within a strict idealist framework, a 'living God' is one that internally comes to be by opposing himself to himself and then sublating this distinction. Put simply, God must be subjected to the same process which formulates the self-consciousness within us; otherwise we are left with nothing but the 'dead God of the scholastics.'<sup>771</sup> As we have already noted in Schelling's methodology, he begins his philosophy with the fact of Being itself: '*Anfang der positiven Philosophie ist also das Sein, das nie potentia gewesen, sondern immer actu.*'<sup>772</sup> He calls this pure actuality the *Unvordenkliche Sein* as that which must simply be presupposed in reality. However, in itself, this 'unprethinkable Being' is *not* the Godhead, which is what emerges out of the process of becoming within the divine; e.g. it is the result.<sup>773</sup> In order for this Godhead to be realised the Being of God must 'go out of itself' to fashion an other that it could be opposed to, in order for the process to be initiated, and it is only in this other's 'lordship over its, now opposed Being, that the Godhead can be realised: '*Die Gottheit besteht in dem Herrsein über das Sein.*'<sup>774</sup> Within this movement of internal becoming of the 'living God' there is a 'suspension'; a middle *between* the 'two stages' and it is here that the world is said to be contained: '*Die Welt ist die Suspension des actu Existierenden in der Gottheit.*'<sup>775</sup>

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<sup>770</sup> Ibid, p.173.

<sup>771</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung (1841/42)* (ed: Manfred Frank), Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1977, p.170.

<sup>772</sup> Ibid, p.161.

<sup>773</sup> Ibid, p.169.

<sup>774</sup> Ibid, p.172.

<sup>775</sup> Ibid, p.177.

The entire process is excited by God's Being and its desire for self-assertion, which Schelling labels *B*. God must overcome *B* (e.g. part of himself) in order to realise himself as the living God.<sup>776</sup> This *B* is something that has been 'thrown out of God'<sup>777</sup> and has constituted the foundation of material creation. Thus, the world, as the intermediary or obstacle to God becoming the realised living God, must necessarily become the platform where this process will play itself out. As we have already noted, these potencies tussle for supremacy within history and the mythological process itself until they are resolved in the revelation of Christianity. Schelling now narrates this agonistic movement of the potencies within God through a theological idiom in the doctrine of the Trinity. The Father is the first potency that begets the second potency, the Son, in an 'unceasing act' in his attempts to master his Being (*B*) and construct his own personality and real existence.<sup>778</sup> The third potency, the Spirit, only emerges after the Son has conquered *B* and the personality of the Godhead as a whole is realised as the unity of the three principles and their Being: '*Im überwundenen B ist der Vater, Sohn und Geist Verwirklicht.*'<sup>779</sup>

It is the 'incarnation' of the second potency<sup>780</sup> and the realisation of the independence of the Son 'outside' of the Father that marks Schelling's second 'time epoch' in history; the first prior to creation is the time of the Father, the time since creation is the time of the Son which, is itself divided into two parts – a period of suffering through *B* (which includes the mythological process and the construction of paganism) and the period when the Son overcomes *B* and returns to the Father.<sup>781</sup> This marks the fundamental difference between mythology and revelation; the former is a *necessary process* occurring within human consciousness which leads to the possibility of revelation, which is assumed to be freely given and unnecessary:

*Doch ist der große Unterschied, daß die Vorstellungen der Mythologie Erzeugnisse eine notwendigen prozesses, oder natürlichen, sich selbst überlassenen Bewußtseins sind, auf welches keine freie Ursache einen Einfluß ausübte; dagegen wird die Offenbarung als etwas gedacht, das*

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<sup>776</sup> Ibid, p.182.

<sup>777</sup> 'Schöpfung ist nicht etwas einfach Positives, gleichsam ein aus sich Hinaussetzen' (Ibid, p.181).

<sup>778</sup> Ibid, pp.194-95.

<sup>779</sup> Ibid, p.196.

<sup>780</sup> For a concise discussion of Schelling's Christology see: Tyler Tritten, *Beyond Presence: The Late F.W.J. Schelling's Criticism of Metaphysics*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2012, pp.325-332; S.J. Garcia, *Christology in F.W.J. Schelling's 'Philosophie der Offenbarung': The incarnation of the Second Potency*, Microfilms International, 1993.

<sup>781</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung (1841/42)* (ed: Manfred Frank), Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1977, pp.207-208.

*einen Actus außer dem Bewußtsein und ein Verhältnis, voraussetzt, welches die frieieste aller Ursachen, Gott, sich Freiwillig zum Menschen gegeben hat.*<sup>782</sup>

Schelling contends that during Christ's incarnation (*Menschwerdung*) he was not in unity with the Father (a sought of kenotic abasement) which was necessary in order for God to set himself outside of God (in the Son) so that he could be in the position of a mediator between himself and B: '*nur die außergöttliche Existenz macht ihn fähig zum Mittler.*'<sup>783</sup> However, Schelling goes on to read Christ's activity or the activity of the second potency throughout the entire history of the world, slowly working towards this climax.<sup>784</sup> The primary cause of Christ's incarnation is the will to redeem and reabsorb B or the '*außergöttlichen Sein.*' In the Incarnation, divinity and humanity become identical in a shared personality (not a shared substance)<sup>785</sup> and God becomes ruler of the *außergöttlichen Sein* or B through its identity, through the incarnation, and then its *negation* in Christ's death, which marks Christianity as the necessary end of the mythological process, in so far as the unity and personality of the Godhead has been achieved, which ushers into human consciousness the epoch of the third potency: the Holy Spirit which is realised in the Church.<sup>786</sup>

### **Summative Remarks.**

Therefore, we have documented and critically analysed Schelling's philosophical path from his early dependency on Fichte to his mature philosophical output. We have sought to demonstrate that Schelling had indeed inherited the 'Valentinian philosophical problems' (outlined in chapter II), from Fichtean Idealism, and that he would go on to attempt to resolve these problems utilising Gnostic mythology itself. We noted Schelling's familiarity with the Gnostic sources from his youth and how the narrative structure of his 'solution' to the philosophical lacunas of Fichte's system, were clearly indebted the conventions of Valentinian Gnosticism. We noted Schelling's commitment to an original monism that was contradicted by finitude. Furthermore, in his attempts to resolve this contradiction, he narrated a 'metaphysical fall' that resulted in an aspect of God being alienated from his own being and generated multiplicity and finitude (this narrative was expressed in various ways in his *Bruno, Philosophy and Religion, Human*

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<sup>782</sup> Ibid, p.250.

<sup>783</sup> Ibid, p.263.

<sup>784</sup> Ibid, p.278.

<sup>785</sup> Ibid, p.289.

<sup>786</sup> Ibid, p.332.

*Freedom, The Ages of the World, and Philosophy of Mythology*). Despite this rupture within the Absolute, the finitude and God remained ontologically bound to each other in a state of angst which was constantly moving towards a unified resolution through a historical process that would eventually culminate in the fallen divine principle being overcome and reabsorbed back in to its original monistic unity (as outlined in the *Philosophy of Revelation*). We shall now assess how Schelling's Gnosticism would shape the identity and functions of the Wisdom figure in Russian Sophiology.



## Chapter V

### Russian Sophiology: The Synthetic Appropriation of Gnosticism and Idealism in the Figure of Wisdom

In the previous chapter we traced the development of Schelling's philosophy, from its early dependency on Fichtean idealism to its mature theogonic and cosmogonic dialectics which typified his later output. The clear current of Valentinian theology and mythology was identified to course throughout his entire corpus; most notably in his inheritance of the *Valentinian philosophical problems* from earlier idealists, and his persistent attempts to resolve these tensions, precisely by constructing theological systems that drew heavily on mythological and cosmological narratives that were indicative of Gnostic thought forms. The task of this current chapter is to analyze the extent to which these ideas have filtered through into aspects of nineteenth and twentieth century Russian philosophy and theology that utilized Schelling so significantly. This has proven to be something of an anomaly within the history of ideas, for apart from some notable exceptions,<sup>787</sup> Hegel was the main export of modern German philosophy. However, nineteenth and twentieth century Russia has proven to be an exception to this typical pattern, embracing – at that time - the rather unpopular ideas of Schelling with such notable enthusiasm, that his influence would soon become felt by several significant generations of Russian intellectuals.<sup>788</sup> Nikolai Berdiaev (1874-1948) once remarked that 'Schelling's was a philosophy beloved by us [the Russian people], and remained so throughout the nineteenth

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<sup>787</sup> For instance, Schelling's influence on S.T. Coleridge has been well documented; see: Christopher Bode, 'Coleridge and philosophy', in: Frederick Burwick (ed), *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp.588-620. Moreover, Paul Tillich's theology was notably indebted to Schellingian thought as he acknowledges himself, describing Schelling as his 'teacher' and noting his dependency on the philosopher; see: Paul Tillich, *Schelling und die Anfänge des Existentialistischen Protestes*, in *Hauptwerke I* (Gunther Wenz ed), Berlin, De Gruyter, 1989, p.392.

<sup>788</sup> The cultural influence that Schelling had over the *Slavophiles* is particularly notable; following Schelling's portrayal of Hegelian philosophy as being the culmination of western rationalism, which gave substance to the *Slavophiles'* resistance to western culture, see: Sergey Horujy, 'Slavophiles, Westernizers, and the Birth of Russian Philosophical Humanism' (trans: Patrick Michelson), in: G.M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole (eds), *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830-1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defence of Human Dignity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp.27-52, p.28; N.V. Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West in the Teachings of the Slavophiles*, Cambridge, 1952; Vsevolod Setchkarev, *Schellings Einfluß in der russischen Literatur der 20er und 30er Jahre des XIX Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1939.

century.’<sup>789</sup> Similarly, Bulgakov himself acknowledges that ‘Schelling was the sole western thinker to have created a foundation on which Russian thought could build.’<sup>790</sup> Furthermore, Orlando Figes notes that Schelling had something akin to a ‘God like status’ in Russia and that there were even ‘Schelling cults.’<sup>791</sup> However, although Schelling’s influence spanned over such a breadth of Russian intellectuals, it is two specific ‘Schellingians’ that shall occupy the interests of this chapter: Vladimir Solovyov and Sergius Bulgakov. The former has been described as ‘the last and greatest Russian Schellingian’<sup>792</sup> and his work has been provocatively characterized as having ‘the pantheistic tendencies of Russian Schellingian-Gnosticism.’<sup>793</sup> Similarly, Bulgakov was no less influenced by Schelling; for instance, Aidan Nichols writes that ‘Schelling’s philosophy underlies Bulgakov’s theology at many points...so much so that Bulgakov can be called a Christian Schellingian.’<sup>794</sup>

The significance of both individuals being philosophically grounded in Schelling’s idealism, is in the extent to which this same philosophy informs the theological reception and construction of the biblical, apocryphal, and Valentinian Wisdom figure that features so prominently in their respective theological and philosophical systems. For in the first instance of Solovyov, Schelling’s dialectical idealism is consciously synthesized with, and expressed through Gnostic and Valentinian cosmology and mythology (a task that was partially initiated by Schelling himself), which subsequently informs the identity and theological functions of Sophia herself. The prominence of Gnostic and Valentinian thought in Solovyov’s philosophy has been fairly

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<sup>789</sup>Nikolai Berdiaev, ‘Concerning the Character of Russian Religious Thought in the Nineteenth Century’, cited from: <http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berdlib/1930345.html>. Last accessed: 28/02/2011.

<sup>790</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Philosophy of Economy: The World as Household* (trans: Catherine Evtuhov), Yale University Press, 2000, p.23.

<sup>791</sup> See: Orlando Figes, *Natasha’s Dance: A Cultural History of Russia*, London, Picador, 2003, p.313.

<sup>792</sup> See: Arsenij Gulyga, *Selling, Zizn zamecatel’nykh ljudej*, Mosckva, 1984, p.302, cited in: Paul Valliere, ‘Solov’ev and Schelling’s Philosophy of Revelation,’ in: Wil van den Bercken, Manon de Courten, and Evert van der Zweede (eds), *Vladimir Solov’ev: Reconciler and Polemicist*, Paris, 2000, pp.119-129, p.119; on Schelling’s relationship to Solovyov see also: Manon de Courten, *History, Sophia, and the Russian Nation*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2004, pp.207-269; Paul Valliere, ‘Solov’ev and Schelling’s Philosophy of Revelation,’ in: Wil van den Bercken, Manon de Courten, and Evert van der Zweede (eds), *Vladimir Solov’ev: Reconciler and Polemicist*, Paris, 2000, pp.119-129.

<sup>793</sup> Evgenij Trubeckoj, *Mirosozercunie VI*, Mosckva, 1913, pp.392-397, cited in: Paul Valliere, ‘Solov’ev and Schelling’s Philosophy of Revelation,’ in: Wil van den Bercken, Manon de Courten, and Evert van der Zweede (eds), *Vladimir Solov’ev: Reconciler and Polemicist*, Paris, 2000, pp.119-129, p.119.

<sup>794</sup> Aidan Nichols, *Light from the East: Authors and Themes in Orthodox Theology*, London, Stag books, 1995, p.59; see, also: Nicholas Sakharov, *I Love Therefore I am*, New York, St.Vladimir’s Press, 2002, p.99.

well acknowledged,<sup>795</sup> even amidst a plethora of various other unreferenced sources and influences ranging from the Kabbalah right through to his own mystical experiences, one can still clearly detect the tenets of Valentinian Gnosticism and their influence. Like Schelling before him, Solovyov maintained a keen interest in nearly all things esoteric. His first published work was entitled *The Mythological Process in Ancient Paganism* (1873) and was clearly reminiscent of Schelling's *Philosophy of Mythology*. After the completion of his master's dissertation, he traveled to London in 1875 on a funded research trip to the British Museum with the authenticated purpose of studying different varieties of Gnosticism.<sup>796</sup> It also appears to be no coincidence that it is around this time that Solovyov first commenced writing his *Sophie*; a work that is conspicuously immersed in Valentinian cosmology. Therefore, there is no doubt that Solovyov had both studied and admired Valentinus and his School (he once described him as being 'one of the greatest intellectual geniuses of all time'<sup>797</sup> and briefly describes the Valentinian system with accuracy and favour in his seminal work on ethical theory *The Justification of the Good* (1897)<sup>798</sup>). The importance of Solovyov's synthesis of idealism and Gnosticism in his Sophiology is in the fact that this template provides the foundation for Bulgakov's own Sophiological endeavors. And, although Bulgakov is well aware of the theological 'dubiousness' of some of Solovyov's sources, which he increasingly attempts to refine and filter, as recent scholarship has shown,<sup>799</sup> it will be nonetheless one of the contentions of this chapter that this process of refinement is neither radical nor extensive enough to negate the Valentinian foundations of Solovyov's Sophiology or indeed his own.

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<sup>795</sup> See, for instance: Maria Carlson, 'Gnostic Elements in the Cosmogony of Vladimir Soloviev,' in: Judith Deutsch Kornblatt and Richard Gustafson (eds), *Russian Religious Thought*, London, Wisconsin Press, 1996, pp.49-68; Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2000, p.112; Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, *Divine Sophia: The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov*, Cornell University, 2009, p.11.

<sup>796</sup> See: Oliver Smith, *Vladimir Soloviev and the Spiritualization of Matter*, Academic Studies Press, 2011, p.26; Paul Allen, *Vladimir Soloviev: Russian Mystic*, Lindisfarne, 1978, chapter 4.

<sup>797</sup> See: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles: II*, Edinburgh, T.&T. Clark, 1986, p.285.

<sup>798</sup> See: Vladimir Solovyov, *The Justification of the Good* (trans: Nathalie A. Duddington), New York, Cosimo, 2010, p.41.

<sup>799</sup> See, for instance: Rowan Williams, *Sergei Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1999; Aidan Nichols, *Wisdom from Above: a Primer in the Theology of Fr. Sergei Bulgakov*, Gracewing, 2005; Andrew Louth, 'Sergei Bulgakov and the Task of Theology', in: *Irish Theological Quarterly* 74:3 2009, pp.243-257, p.250.

The focus of this chapter shall therefore be the Sophiological positions of Vladimir Solovyov and Sergius Bulgakov.<sup>800</sup> The primary contention of this chapter shall attempt to demonstrate that the ‘Sophiological systems’ of Solovyov and Bulgakov construct synthetic philosophical and theological positions through the medium of Sophia which is itself a deliberate (at least in the instance of Solovyov) blend of Schellingian philosophy, the Judeo-Christian figure of Wisdom, and the Gnostic (Valentinian) cosmological and mythological narratives, which have been inherited through the influence of Schelling and German idealism more broadly.

To address these issues we shall first evaluate the ‘wisdom writings’ of Solovyov, with the view to providing strong evidence of his dependency on Schelling and his conscious use of Valentinian cosmology and mythology in the construction of his ‘Sophiology.’ Solovyov’s most significant ‘wisdom writings’ shall be taken to be *The Sophie* (1876), *Lectures on Divine-Humanity* (1877-1881), and *Russia and the Universal Church* (1883), which shall form the basis of the evaluation of his adoption and construction of the function of the Wisdom figure within his philosophy. Then finally, we shall offer a detailed consideration and critique of Bulgakov’s Sophiology, which shall be analyzed in two major stages: early Sophiological writings and their relationship to Solovyov and Schelling (including his 1912 *Philosophy of Economy* and 1917 *The Unfading Light*), and his mature Sophiology of the two trilogies (*The Burning Bush* (1927), *The Friend of the Bridegroom* (1927), *Jacob’s Ladder* (1929) and: *The Lamb of God* (1933), *The Comforter* (1936), and *The Bride of the lamb* (1945)) as well as other significant essays and publications of this period.<sup>801</sup>

## **Solovyov and Sophia: Mysticism, Esotericism, Idealism, and Valentinian Wisdom Theology**

### **Solovyov’s Personality and its Significance for his Sophiology**

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<sup>800</sup> I note ‘Sophiological positions’ specifically because the range of their respective philosophies embodies more than just references to the figure of Wisdom (however integral that figure has proven to be to their various proposals), and given the scope of this study, I shall only consider aspects of their theology and philosophy that I consider to be absolutely necessary to the exposition of Sophia within their writings. This is not an individual study on the thought of Solovyov and Bulgakov, but on their Sophiology, and only insofar as this has provided the basis for a particular theme in John Milbank’s theology; this lens shall remain constant throughout the proceeding assessments and I ask the reader to remain mindful of this disclaimer when noting any ‘gaps’ in content.

<sup>801</sup> Bulgakov’s earlier output from the end of the nineteenth century to the turn of the twentieth shall not be considered here, principally because they bare no direct relation to his later Sophiology, but are rather characterized by his atheist and Marxist commitments of the time.

Vladimir Sergeyevich Solovyov<sup>802</sup> was the son of a respected professor of history at Moscow University with family connections to the priesthood, whilst his mother was of Ukrainian descent. He was one of nine other children and he was apparently a withdrawn, dreamy, and somewhat strange child. Although Solovyov had a fairly strict and pious upbringing, we are told that, from about the age of fourteen, he became a convinced atheist and materialist; the Russian philosopher and boyhood friend of Solovyov, L.M. Lopatin once reminisced that ‘there was a period in his life [Solovyov’s] when he was a thorough materialist...never since have I met a materialist so passionately convinced.’<sup>803</sup> Having graduated from the gymnasium that he had attended since his eleventh year, he enrolled himself, at the age of eighteen, in the Moscow faculty of natural science. However, his earlier atheistic tendencies had begun to soften and he became increasingly interested in philosophy; thus abandoning his scientific studies he was accepted by the faculty of history and philology from which he graduated in 1873. His final year of education took place in the Moscow theological academy, by which time he had reignited his Orthodox faith.<sup>804</sup>

Solovyov was an incredibly enigmatic and paradoxical figure for a variety of reasons. His nephew, S.M. Solovyov, once suggested that his uncle was the prototype for two lead characters in Dostoyevsky’s famous *The Brothers Karamazov*; the rational and analytical Ivan and the ‘other-worldly’ mystically inclined Aloysha.<sup>805</sup> The unlikely coincidence of these two seemingly

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<sup>802</sup> See, for instance: L.Müller, *Soloviev und der Protestantismus*, Freiburg, 1951; P. Zouboff, *Godmanhood as the Main Idea of Vladimir Solovyev*, New York 1944; K.V. Mochulski, *V.S. Solovyov*, Paris, 1936; N.O. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, New York, International Universities Press, 1951, pp.81-133; N.O. Lossky, ‘The Philosophy of V.L. Solovyev’ (trans: Nathalie Duddington), *Slavonic Review II* (1923), pp.346-358; D. Stremmooukoff, *Vladimir Soloviev and his Messianic Work* (trans: Elizabeth Meyendoerff), Belmont, 1980; Jonathan Sutton, *The Religious Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov: Towards a Reassessment*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1988; V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy II* (trans: George Kline), London, Routledge, 1953, pp.469-532; Nicolas Zernov, *Three Russian Prophets: Khomiakov, Dostoyevsky, Soloviev*, London, SCM Press, 1944; Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, *Divine Sophia: The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov*, Cornell University, 2009; Frederick Copleston, *A History of Russian Philosophy X*, London, Continuum, 2003, pp.201-241; Oliver Smith, *Vladimir Soloviev and the Spiritualization of Matter*, Academic Studies Press, 2011; Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2000; Paul Allen, *Vladimir Soloviev: Russian Mystic*, Lindisfarne, 1978; William Desmond, *Is There a Sabbath for Thought*, Fordham University Press, 2005; Brandon Gallaher, ‘The Christological Focus of Vladimir Solov’ev’s Sophiology’, in: *Modern Theology XXV:IV* (2009), pp.617-646; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles: II*, Edinburgh, T.&T. Clark, 1986.

<sup>803</sup> L.M. Lopatin, ‘The Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov’ (trans: A. Bakshy), *Mind XXV* (1916), p.428.

<sup>804</sup> See: V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy II* (trans: George Kline), London, Routledge, 1953, pp.474-75.

<sup>805</sup> Solovyov’s nephew S.M. Solovyov once suggested that his uncle was the prototype for two characters in Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*: the mystically inclined Aloysha and the rational and analytical Ivan.

incompatible personalities provides as a good a character profile as any for Vladimir Solovyov: he was a vegetarian (which is still almost akin to lunacy even in contemporary Russia) and an avid supporter of animal rights. He had strong Slavophile tendencies whilst being an advocate of ecumenism and a papal sympathizer.<sup>806</sup> He supported women's rights and lectured at the women's higher courses<sup>807</sup> and was an outspoken critic of corporeal punishment; a view which he most famously expressed in a lecture several weeks after Alexander II's assassination (1881), calling for the perpetrator to receive mercy and forgiveness (something which lost Solovyov much support).<sup>808</sup> He was a poet and a rigorously analytical philosopher. He considered himself a prophet and was undoubtedly something akin to an 'esoteric mystic.' Although Solovyov's conception of Sophia was influenced by a wide variety of sources and most especially - as this chapter will intend to show - by Valentinian Gnosticism, one cannot deny the place of Solovyov's own enigmatic and mystical personality within this formative process itself.<sup>809</sup> For, when Solovyov adopts the figure of Wisdom within his philosophy, she is not merely an abstract mediator between God and creation, nor a particular mythical figure within a wider cosmogonic narrative (although she is both of these things for Solovyov as well) but primarily and firstly she is a *real* and *tangible* female person that Solovyov believed himself to have encountered three times within his life and a figure to whom he felt personally connected. For instance, during his time in London, Solovyov attended various séances<sup>810</sup> where he apparently became fascinated with the phenomenon of 'automatic writing.'<sup>811</sup> Solovyov appears to have attempted to channel the creativity of Sophia in his own writings using this technique on numerous occasions; for instance, in some of the original fragments of *Sophie* there are instances of automatic writing

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Although Dostoyevsky was a good friend of Vladimir Solovyov's this claim cannot be definitively verified; see: S.M. Solov'ev, *Vladimir Solov'ev: zhizn' i tvorcheskaia evoliutsiia*, Moskva, Republika, 1997, p.180, cited in: Vladimir Solovyov, *The Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge* (trans: Valeria Nollan), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2008, p.2.

<sup>806</sup> See: Vladimir Solovyev, *Russia and the Universal Church* (trans: Herbert Rees), London, Centenary Press, pp.85-140.

<sup>807</sup> On its history see: Christine Johanson, *Women's Struggle for higher Education in Russia 1855-1900*, McGill-Queens University Press, 1987.

<sup>808</sup> See: Bernice Rosenthal and Martha Chomiak (eds), *A Revolution of the Spirit: A Crisis of Value 1890-1924*, Fordham University, 1990, p.38.

<sup>809</sup> Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, *Divine Sophia: The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov*, Cornell University, 2009, p.11.

<sup>810</sup> V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy II* (trans: George Kline), London, Routledge, 1953, p.475.

<sup>811</sup> Automatic writing is apparently an attempt to channel spiritual forces, where one enters into a trance like state and becomes the instrument of a particular spirit which is then able to communicate messages through the possessed person's own writing. For an account of 'automatic writing' see: Anita Muhl, *Automatic Writing*, Kessinger, 2003.

within the margins themselves.<sup>812</sup> His own fascinating account of his encounters with Lady Wisdom are documented in his poem *Three Meetings* (1862 -75-76) which sheds some light on Solovyov's own conception of Sophia herself.

Firstly, Solovyov is emphatic that these 'experiences' were indeed real: 'have you not thrice appeared to my real sight? You have not been a figment of the mind.'<sup>813</sup> He was apparently nine years old when the first vision took place on the feast of the Ascension within a Church service:

'The sanctuary was open...But where were priest and deacon?

Where was the crowd of praying people? Suddenly,

The stream of passions dried up without a trace.

Azure was all around; azure was in my soul.

Suffused with golden azure, and your hand

Holding a flower that came from other lands,

You stood there smiling a smile of radiance.

You nodded to me and vanished in the mist.'<sup>814</sup>

The second encounter occurred during Solovyov's research trip, whilst he was sitting in the reading room of the British Museum. Apparently, he was beckoned by 'mysterious powers' 'to choose for reading everything possible concerning her [Sophia]'.<sup>815</sup> He then recalls the encounter:

'But once – it was autumn – I said to her:

“O blossoming of divinity! I feel

Your presence here. But why have you not revealed

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<sup>812</sup> For examples of this see, for instance, Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, *Divine Sophia: The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov*, Cornell University, 2009, p.134; and for an account of Solovyov's use of this technique see: Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, 'Who is Sophia and Why is She Writing in my Manuscript: Vladimir Solovyov and the Channeling of Divine Wisdom', in: *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies III-IV* (2007).

<sup>813</sup> Vladimir Solovyov, 'Three Meetings,' in: Boris Jakim and Laury Magnus, *The Religious Poetry of Vladimir Solovyov*, Semantron Press, 2008, p.99.

<sup>814</sup> Ibid, p.100.

<sup>815</sup> Ibid, p.101.

Yourself to my eyes since I was a child?”

Hardly had I thought these words

When all around was filled with golden azure

And before me she was shining again –

But only her face, it was her face alone.<sup>816</sup>

Following this encounter, Solovyov recalls hearing an internal voice instructing him to go to Egypt to see Sophia again. Needless to say, given Solovyov’s temperament, he recklessly heeded this call spending the last of his small stipend on travel expenses to Cairo, where he would receive further instruction directing him to go into the Sahara desert. Thus, a penniless and rather disheveled Solovyov marched into the desert wearing a warm overcoat and a top hat, where he was set upon by a group of Bedouins<sup>817</sup> who mistook him for a demon. Solovyov mentions that he feared for his life, but after being held trial by sheiks of two tribes he was bound and taken into the middle of the desert, untied and abandoned. He then informs his readers that he was lying in freezing conditions in star lit darkness fending off hungry Jackals, when his internal voice commanded him to sleep.<sup>818</sup>

Then I fell into a deep sleep; and when I waked

The fragrance of roses wafted from earth and heaven.

And in the purple of the heavenly glow

You gazed with eyes full of an azure fire.

And your gaze was like the first shining

Of universal and creative day.

What is, what was, and what will be were here

Embraced within that one fixed gaze...The seas

And rivers all turned blue beneath me, as did

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<sup>816</sup> Ibid, p.102.

<sup>817</sup> Bedouins are desert dwelling tribes.

<sup>818</sup> Even Solovyov himself remarks on the comedy of this whole scenario given its sheer absurdity (see: Vladimir Solovyov, ‘Three Meetings,’ in: Boris Jakim and Laury Magnus, *The Religious Poetry of Vladimir Solovyov*, Semantron Press, 2008, p.104).



The distant forest and the snow-capped mountain heights.

I saw it all, and all of it was one,

One image there of beauty feminine...

The immeasurable was confined within that image.

Before me, in me, you alone were there.

O radiant one! I'm not deceived by you.

I saw all of you there in the desert...

And in my soul those roses shall not fade

Wherever it is the billows of life may rush me.'<sup>819</sup>

Thus for Solovyov, Sophia is a very real feminine entity that he believed himself to be acquainted with. Therefore, having obtained a brief biographical outline of Solovyov and underlined some of the personal characteristics that would eventually become influential in his philosophical output, and especially in his Sophiology, we shall now explore some of his philosophical commitments that would also play a huge part in shaping his theogony, cosmology, and soteriology where the figure of Sophia features so prominently.

### **Solovyov and Schellingian Idealism: The Path to Integral Knowledge and the Inheritance of the Valentinian Presuppositions and their Accompanying Philosophical Problems.**

Solovyov's first significant philosophical publication was his completed Master's dissertation entitled *The Crisis of Western Philosophy: Against Positivism* (1874). The thesis itself is a lucid and conscientious critique of western philosophy, deeply indebted to Schelling, which culminates in several unique proposals to support philosophy in overcoming its perceived *impasse*.

Solovyov describes Hegelian philosophy as a form of '*panlogism*'<sup>820</sup> by the use of which he intends to encapsulate Schelling's entire critique of western philosophy which culminates with Hegel himself. His criticisms hinge on Schelling's distinction between negative and positive philosophy with specific reference to the limitations of the former; or, on Schelling's insistence

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<sup>819</sup> Ibid, p.105.

<sup>820</sup> Vladimir Solovyov, *The Crisis of Western Philosophy: Against the Positivists* (trans: Boris Jakim), Steiner, 1996, p.46.

that an abstract concept only constitutes a possibility and must therefore be distinguished from reality. Solovyov puts it thus:

Hegel's Philosophy, as a system absolute in its sphere, completely self-enclosed, cannot be rejected partially...One can exit it only by recognizing the one-sidedness or limitation of its whole sphere or of its very principle, i.e., the principle of abstract concept, the sphere of pure logic...Hegel's doctrine... was immediately rejected in its absoluteness by a simple axiomatic assertion: concept is not everything. In other words, concept as such is not yet reality.<sup>821</sup>

Solovyov argues that the success of Hegel's system lies in its ability to pass itself off as something actually existing when in truth, this is a mere sophism; a form of deception that Solovyov likes to call a 'hypostasized abstraction,'<sup>822</sup> which is easily deconstructed:

It is perfectly clear that those quantitative and qualitative determinations which constitute a material object, such as shape, size, mass, colour, and so forth, *do not exist by themselves in separation*...The separateness of these elementary properties is only a result of rational abstraction [something that occurs in human reason only]...[Then, in Hegel's system] actual being is attributed to them, a being which they do not have in their separateness.<sup>823</sup>

Like Schelling before him, Solovyov then concludes that Hegel's philosophy already implies a beyond in its very completeness; the need for an accompanying philosophy: 'Hegel's system, by concluding philosophical rationalism and expressing it in all its exclusiveness (and thus making its limitations obvious), called into being the demand for another philosophy, not abstract-logical, but *positive*.'<sup>824</sup> And, again following Schelling, Solovyov insists that this positive philosophy must take on the form of empiricism (in order to qualify logical possibility through experiential reality): 'it [positive philosophy] must be based on the content of consciousness. That is it must have an empirical source of knowledge.'<sup>825</sup> Thus, situating himself firmly within the methodology of Schelling's positive philosophy, Solovyov attempts to construct his own proposals within this apparatus.

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<sup>821</sup> Ibid, p.50.

<sup>822</sup> Ibid, p.96.

<sup>823</sup> Ibid, pp.93-94 (my emphasis).

<sup>824</sup> Ibid, p.104.

<sup>825</sup> Ibid, p.71, a point which Solovyov makes again and again, see for instance: 'from Hegel's logic we take some more general concept...the concept of being-for-itself, it is clear that we do not find out from this concept whether or not anything that is for itself actually exists. We can discover this only empirically. On the basis of the concept we can assert only that being-for-itself is thinkable or possible, and that if something that exists for itself actually exists, it must satisfy all the logical moments that are contained in the concept of being-for-itself. However, in logical concepts we know only the possibilities and necessary conditions of that which exists, not that which exists itself' (Ibid, p.109). Compare this with F.W.J. Schelling, *Grounding of Positive Philosophy* (trans: Bruce Matthews), New York, State University of New York Press, 2007, p.130, p.151.

One of the primary questions that Solovyov now seeks to answer, in the wake of his borrowed method, is fundamentally: how one can come to empirically know an ‘in-itself’ immediately through sense and thought? Solovyov’s response to this question is markedly Idealist in affirming that this process can be identified within self-consciousness itself, where we both feel and think ourselves independently of external representation: ‘in our consciousness we have a certain reality; a certain immediate manifestation of that which truly exists and therefore know that which truly exists.’<sup>826</sup> Solovyov believes that he is on the path to satisfying the demands of Schelling’s methodology and producing a positive philosophy:

All other objects are accessible to us only from outside, in forms of representation, whereas we are accessible to ourselves from within as well, from the subjective side in self-consciousness or inner feeling, where the independent essence is reflected in the most immediate way. In self-consciousness, this essence does not enter into the forms of external representation, but is known by us as our own will.<sup>827</sup>

This suggestion leads to one of the central tenets of Solovyov’s whole metaphysics: the principle of *All-Unity*. According to Solovyov, if the ‘in-itself’ or the ‘truly existent’ (истинно-сущее) is really accessible to us within our own self-consciousness, where we have an immediate sense or inner feeling and thought of ourselves, then this must presuppose an internal ontological connection between ourselves and the ‘truly existent.’ To characterize this connection, Solovyov suggests that our Spirit is a mere aspect, component, and manifestation of that Spirit which truly exists in-itself, which he contends is a monistic whole or ‘all-one.’

An essential identity between metaphysical essence and the knower, i.e., our spirit, is presupposed. This essence is thus determined to be the all-one spirit, of which our spirit is a particular manifestation or image, so that through our inner experience we can obtain real knowledge of metaphysical substance.<sup>828</sup>

It is quite clear from his appeal to an integral knowledge of an absolute monistic reality which humanity forms a constitutive part of, that Solovyov has not only adopted Schelling’s philosophical methodology, but more significantly, Schelling’s monism with its notion of absolute identity. This foundational commitment to a primary monism, as we have consistently seen, always generates the *Valentinian philosophical problems* that Solovyov appears to have

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<sup>826</sup>826 Vladimir Solovyov, *The Crisis of Western Philosophy: Against the Positivists* (trans: Boris Jakim), Steiner, 1996, p.62.

<sup>827</sup> Ibid, p.74.

<sup>828</sup> Ibid, p.138.

inherited from Schelling's Idealism. In turn this always produces the 'problem of finitude' e.g. 'why and how does it exist in light of this higher reality' which is nearly always accompanied by the opprobrious acknowledgement of its existence as something which should simply not be; something which contradicts this higher reality and must be negated. These issues quickly become the axis on which Solovyov's philosophy begins to rotate as he attempts to respond to them; which he does in his fragmentary and incomplete work *The Sophie* (1876).

### **Solovyov's Valentinian Mythology and Cosmology: A Response to the Valentinian Philosophical Problems.**

As we have already noted, Solovyov first started writing *The Sophie* on his research trip to London which he subsequently abandoned when he had his second mystical encounter with Sophia who apparently summoned him to Cairo. Taking a 'scenic route' back from Egypt to London via Italy he completes, at least a rough draft of the work, which he describes as being of a 'mystical-theosophical-philosophical-theurgic-political context, in a dialogic form.'<sup>829</sup> The work itself had, it was thought, initially been intended as his doctoral dissertation, however after some careful reflection, Solovyov decided against this, given the overt esoteric character of the production. Despite Solovyov's high intentions for the work it was never published and never fully completed. Judith Kornblatt describes it as being 'several chapters of differing length and completeness, filled with notes to himself, snippets of barely decipherable automatic writing, and Gnostic and other mystical terminology.'<sup>830</sup> The text ranges from philosophy to grand expressions of Gnostic mythology (which were clearly informed by Solovyov's research at the time in the British Museum). However, despite the state of the incomplete work, one cannot doubt its importance for Solovyov who wrote to his father (May 1876) claiming that 'it [*The Sophie*] will be the basis of all my future endeavors and I can do nothing without referring to it.'<sup>831</sup>

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<sup>829</sup> Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, *Divine Sophia: The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov*, Cornell University, 2009, p.109.

<sup>830</sup> Ibid. As Kornblatt suggests, the work is notably unpolished; not only were there margins full of notes correcting the text and making various suggestions but there were even mundane notes to himself, such as: 'I owe 637 francs to the little Chinese man' (Ibid, p.157), which demonstrates the depth of its incompleteness.

<sup>831</sup> Ibid, p.109.

The most interesting aspects of *The Sophie*, in respect to our concerns, are undoubtedly those instances where Solovyov attempts to tackle the *Valentinian philosophical problems*, which he inherited from Schelling, precisely by appealing to Gnostic cosmology and mythology, which we shall now evaluate.

One of the first aspects of Gnostic thought to surface in this text is Solovyov's appeal to, what we have called existential alienation, which is the inevitable product of the 'problem of finitude.' The status quo is perceived to be in contradiction to the truly existent, which can be felt by those who have a special perception, which subsequently causes existential angst in the perceiver. One of Solovyov's most significant points is that this higher reality is revealed by the human phenomenon of laughter:

It is obvious that man can only be free of the exterior necessity of the phenomenal world because he does *not belong completely to it*...He can only be free of the world because *he belongs to another one*. Thus, human laughter proves man's natural freedom, proves as well his status as a metaphysical being...He laughs...because he knows quite well that true reality belongs to that other world, to the ideal world, of which this one is only a *deformed shadow*.<sup>832</sup>

In the first dialog of the work between the mysterious feminine figure *Sophie* and the inquisitive philosopher, Solovyov affirms his commitment to his monistic 'first principle' which he sometimes refers to as 'unity and absolute simplicity.'<sup>833</sup> Continuing to explore some of the issues which he addressed in his masters dissertation, he again poses the question as to how someone can come to know the truly existent 'in itself.' And this time, slightly modifying his theory of integral knowledge, suggests that the truly existent can be known through its self-manifestation, which occurs precisely through external phenomena and reveals a certain insight in to its inner nature through its self-revelation:

Sophie: Do you know me? Do you know with whom you are speaking?

Philosopher: As if I could not know you!

Sophie: You no doubt know me as phenomenon, that is, insofar as I exist for you or in my external manifestation. You cannot know me as I am in myself, that is my thoughts and intimate feelings as they are in me and for me. You know them only when they manifest themselves

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<sup>832</sup> Ibid, p.117.

<sup>833</sup> Ibid, p.127 (my emphasis).

outwardly in the expression of my eyes in my words and my gestures. These are only external phenomena and yet...

Philosopher: And yet, when I look into the deep azure of your eyes, when I hear the music of your voice, is it outward phenomena of sight and sound that I perceive? My God! I know your thoughts and feelings, and, by your thoughts and feelings, *I know your inner being*.

Sophie: You know the interior phenomena by way of the exterior, and, by that, the being-itself.<sup>834</sup>

This manifestation of the Absolute must, contends Solovyov in typical idealist dialectical fashion, form an essential part of its own constitution as the Absolute, without which it would simply not exist: 'it must be the union of itself and of its opposite. In order to be truly absolute and infinite, it must also be the principle of relativity and finitude.'<sup>835</sup> Thus, Solovyov begins to conceive of the problem of finitude as a necessary expression of the infinite and the absolute in order for it to truly 'become itself' as absolute. He frames this dialectical process within the familiar Schellingian theogony that we explored in the previous chapter. Hence, he suggests that God's substance is constituted by two opposing poles or drives towards being: one yearns for divine unity and simplicity and is therefore inward looking, and the other is a drive to love or to communicate its being in otherness and multiplicity.<sup>836</sup> The indispensable role of 'creation' is therefore to become the platform in which the Absolute can overcome what is necessary in its being by what is free (through its self-assertion over the creation). The creation itself engenders a new dialectical relationship within the absolute: matter and spirit. And when spirit *manifests itself* to matter it hierarchically emanates ontological degrees of its manifested self which are subsequently divided into mind, soul and body.<sup>837</sup> However, although Solovyov has accounted for the need of finitude and its purpose insofar as it is part of the Absolute's dialectical becoming, he then attempts to explore what this means for the world itself. The philosopher asks 'where the new world [our world] comes from?' And Sophie explains that this world is not new in its essence (which is still essentially united to the monistic absolute), but is an aspect of the Absolute which is in a 'state of separation;' it has become something akin to an 'extra-divine state' which should not exist.<sup>838</sup> Solovyov contends that this extra-divine state is underpinned by three levels of being: matter (which acts as the substance of the extra-divine world), the world-

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<sup>834</sup> Ibid, p.123 (my emphasis).

<sup>835</sup> Ibid, p.128.

<sup>836</sup> Ibid, p.129.

<sup>837</sup> Ibid, p.140.

<sup>838</sup> Ibid, p.141.

soul (and the plethora of individual souls which are contained within it, which Solovyov uses interchangeably with Sophia and the ideal form of humanity<sup>839</sup>) which is the spiritual dimension of this separated reality and that which remains in connection with the Absolute, and finally there is a formal principle to this world which is that which makes the world what it is or gives it its form; which is divided into two opposing drives, one being that of the creative Demiurge (which Solovyov uses deliberately as it is ‘a name which is blessed by Christian Gnosticism’<sup>840</sup>) and the other being a satanical force that vies with the Demiurge for supremacy over this world, which is also sometimes called the cosmic spirit.<sup>841</sup> As we have already noted, this extra-divine world is, in its essence, still a component of the Absolute which is a manifestation of its necessary process of self-realization; however, according to Solovyov, there is another dimension to this mythology, where he tries to account for how this extra-divine world has come to be underpinned by these three principles. For, he suggests that the soul of the world wanted to know the divine spirit or the Absolute directly and be like it: ‘it wanted to be for itself, to create and govern its world like the Divine Spirit and, in becoming equal to that Spirit, to unite itself with it and to know it directly.’<sup>842</sup> Just like Sophia in the Valentinian mythology, this is something which it is simply not capable of, and its consequences are ontologically devastating for this yearning aeon which then falls away from its essential unity with the Absolute, which Solovyov describes as a ‘transcendental event’ and the ‘fall of the soul.’<sup>843</sup>

He states that: ‘the soul is a principle of unity and love insofar as it is passive and submits to the ideal spiritual world. But in rising up against them and in separating itself out, in becoming egotistical, it becomes the principle of separate and exclusive being, of division, of hatred and struggle.’<sup>844</sup> Thus, in its alienated state of non-conformity to the truly existent, the soul is divided into its positive creative capacity as Demiurge and its self-affirming and negative capacity as Satan or the cosmic spirit.<sup>845</sup>

Solovyov, in typical Gnostic fashion, is adamant that the soul’s current state cannot remain unresolved insofar as it contradicts the truly existent and must be restored to the divine Spirit:

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<sup>839</sup> See: Ibid, p.156.

<sup>840</sup> Ibid, p.146.

<sup>841</sup> Ibid, p.141.

<sup>842</sup> Ibid, p.143.

<sup>843</sup> Ibid, p.144.

<sup>844</sup> Ibid, p.145.

<sup>845</sup> Ibid, p.142.

‘the integral organism of divine humanity, lacerated by the fall...must be restored.’<sup>846</sup> This restoration occurs through a gratuitous descent of the divine Logos which unites itself to the soul in the person of Jesus Christ, this can occur given that every human soul is an aspect of the fallen world-soul and the principles of separation and struggle are overcome by Christ and the extra-divine world is once again, in its essence, conformed to the truly existent.<sup>847</sup>

This rather complicated and highly speculative mythology, which attempts to account for the world in light of his commitment to his Schellingian monism, has all of the components of the Valentinian narrative outlined in chapter II: there is the foundational monism, the problem of finitude, a rejection of the finite world in light of that which truly exists above, an attempt to explain this finite realm through an event within the Absolute itself which results in an aspect of itself falling away and constituting multiplicity which contradicts the truly divine, and then there is the restitution of this fallen aspect through the descent of the Logos; this mythology is all framed within Solovyov’s dialectic which is clearly indebted to Schelling. This basic narrative will form the foundation for Solovyov’s Sophiology, which we shall assess shortly. However, before we do so, we shall need to take account of the further developments in this basic narrative that Solovyov elucidates in his *The philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge* (1877)

### **Solovyov’s Valentinian Narrative Transposed into His Philosophy: Further Dialectics and Metaphysics.**

In his *Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge*, Solovyov continues to grapple with many of the issues that occupied his endeavors in *The Sophie*, only this time with much greater astuteness to his philosophical audience. The first part of the book is a general historical introduction and assessment of Western and Eastern philosophy. One of his major contentions to emerge out of this process is that, for Solovyov, there are three basic forms of being: feeling, thinking, and willing, which, when manifested in the social realm of existence, constitute three corresponding states: the economic society, the political society, and the religious society.<sup>848</sup> According to Solovyov, these three basic social realms were originally parts of a single whole; apparently the spheres of knowledge or thinking (philosophy, theology, and science) were united

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<sup>846</sup> Ibid, p.158.

<sup>847</sup> Ibid, pp.148-158.

<sup>848</sup> Vladimir Solovyov, *The Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge* (trans: Valeria Z. Nollan), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2008, pp.25-26.



in theosophy; the branches of society or willing (Church, government, and economical society) were united within a single theocracy; and the dimension of feeling (mysticism, fine art, and technical art) were contained within a single theurgy. However, this original harmony was slowly deconstructed throughout history. And Solovyov believes that pessimism is the only logical conclusion which can be drawn from the current state of the social world, which he describes as a ‘game not worth a candle.’<sup>849</sup> This pessimism is quickly transformed into a longing for another world which acts as an impetus to not give up on finite existence, he states that one must: ‘acknowledge that there exists, higher than a person and external nature, another absolute, divine world, endlessly more real, rich, and alive than the world of apparent, superficial phenomena.’<sup>850</sup> And, moreover, following Schelling, that this acknowledgement is a natural human response, given the fact that ‘a person himself in his eternal origins belongs to that transcendental world.’<sup>851</sup>

The next logical question to pose is therefore how does one awaken this internal awareness of the higher realm within society itself? Solovyov responds by claiming that it is a task for the Russian people (a clear hint of his Slavophile tendencies) which must occur through a special type of knowing which he calls ‘free theosophy’ that is an ‘organic synthesis of theology, philosophy, and experiential science, and only this synthesis may contain in itself the integral truth of knowledge.’<sup>852</sup> Solovyov suggests that the first step to obtaining this knowledge can occur by reflecting on the finitude of the world which is not self-sufficient, appealing to Aristotle; he claims that the world must posit a higher cause or sustainer as its first principle.<sup>853</sup> However, this acknowledgement can only present the inquirer with the knowledge of some unknown necessary cause. Solovyov contends that it must be known philosophically, for if it cannot be known then it cannot exist, and if it does not exist then the world itself could not be acknowledged (which contradicts empirical reasoning); thus if this unknown cause does exist, and it is known, then Solovyov must explore how it can come to be known. After exploring the two most obvious forms of epistemology, realism and idealism, he concludes that neither overcomes the problem of the unknown which can only be grasped within the realms of

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<sup>849</sup> Ibid, p.50.

<sup>850</sup> Ibid.

<sup>851</sup> Ibid.

<sup>852</sup> Ibid, p.157.

<sup>853</sup> Ibid, p.60.

*mysticism* (which Solovyov acknowledges as a legitimate form of epistemology),<sup>854</sup> which he takes to be the necessary ‘basis for a genuine philosophy.’<sup>855</sup> Thus, the purpose of this philosophy is to ‘promote in...the sphere of knowledge, the displacement of the center of human existence from its own given nature to the absolute, transcendental world, in other words – to promote a person’s internal union with the truly existent.’<sup>856</sup> Furthermore, picking up some of the themes of his *Sophie*, this mystical knowledge is indebted to the self-manifestation of the truly existent which engages the whole sphere of human knowing in its mystical, psychical, and physical components.<sup>857</sup> Therefore, this knowledge is ‘inspired’ by the truly existent through ‘the action of higher, ideal entities upon the human spirit’<sup>858</sup> (which appears to explain what Solovyov was doing when he attempted to channel Sophia in his own writings).

Despite sounding like a pre-Kantian appeal to dubious modes of epistemology, Solovyov does defend his account of mystical knowledge on the pretense that the limits of the human mind cannot be circumscribed by any philosophy, even Kant’s, for in doing so one would already have gone beyond the realms of human knowing by making absolute and definitive claims to truth that could not be known from within this side of the posited epistemological parameter (Solovyov appears to be drawing attention to Jacobi’s critique of the paradoxes within Kant’s method).<sup>859</sup>

According to Solovyov, this truly existent reality is a solitary unity which is both beyond being and non-being. The world’s only connection to it is that its existence is a product of this Absolute’s self-manifestation or its ‘relationship to an other.’<sup>860</sup> This conclusion would then suggest that human beings within the world are able to have knowledge of this truly existent in so far as we are parts of its own self-revelation.<sup>861</sup> To account for the Absolute’s relating to an other (the world), Solovyov constructs his own form of theogonic and cosmogonic dialectics,

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<sup>854</sup> Ibid, p.70.

<sup>855</sup> Ibid, p.71.

<sup>856</sup> Ibid, p.78.

<sup>857</sup> Ibid,p.86.

<sup>858</sup> Ibid.

<sup>859</sup> Solovyov articulates it thus: ‘how can we know that the human mind is limited?’ For if we answer this question empirically then Solovyov is able to legitimately ask how one can draw an absolute conclusion from an isolated empirical observation, why must the result stay the same? And if one were to give the classic Kantian riposte then Solovyov would respond by stating that it is impossible to legitimately comprehend the limit without some acknowledgement of its beyond e.g. it would be making an absolute metaphysical claim which it is simply not entitled to, given its own definition (see: Ibid, p.87).

<sup>860</sup> Ibid, p.99.

<sup>861</sup> Ibid, p.100.

which is at once both heavily indebted to Hegel whilst remaining critical of his system. Therefore, put slightly more accurately, Solovyov is attempting to produce a ‘post-Schellingian’ form of Hegelian dialectic that seeks to confirm its logical content by appealing to a reality independent of the logical system itself. Solovyov calls this ‘positive dialectics’: ‘it acknowledges that the logical content of our pure thought is identical to the logical content of that which is existent...that the same...definitions we dialectically consider also belong to the existent, but completely independently of our thought.’<sup>862</sup> Following Schelling’s theogony in *Die Weltalter* and the *Freiheit* essay, Solovyov affirms that the Absolute contains two poles within its being: one that strives for unity and the other that strives to communicate its existence: ‘the absolute necessarily in all of eternity is distinguished in two poles...the first is the principle of unconditional unity or individuality...the second is the principle or generating force of being.’<sup>863</sup> However, in order for it to realize itself as the Absolute, it must posit itself for itself which it must do in its opposite: ‘it eternally finds in itself its opposite, since only through the relationship to this opposite can it affirm its own self, hence they are completely interrelated.’<sup>864</sup>

This process of ‘othering’ the Absolute occurs within the Triune model. The ‘truly existent’ is in a state of pure potentiality, which Solovyov describes as the ‘positive nothing’ (or the Kabbalistic *En-Sof*, or the Father) which then differentiates itself from itself within an ‘other,’ which Solovyov calls the Logos, Word, Son, or Manifestation, and finally affirms itself for itself through a third synthesis which he designates as the Holy Spirit. Thus we are left with:

First, in substantial, fundamental, and primary unity with the super-existent, i.e., in pure potentiality or positive nothing (*En-Sof*, or God the Father); second, in differentiation from the super-existent, or in the act of manifestation (in Logos or the Son); and third, in the free, i.e., mediated, unity with the super-existent (in the Holy Spirit).<sup>865</sup>

Within the manifestation of the Absolute, Solovyov draws three ontological distinctions: ‘the concealed Logos’ which is simply the un-activated possibility of manifestation; the ‘revealed Logos’ which is the idea of the possibility of the manifestation itself accessible to the mind, and

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<sup>862</sup> Ibid, p.105.

<sup>863</sup> Ibid, p.114.

<sup>864</sup> Ibid, p.116.

<sup>865</sup> Ibid, p.139.

thirdly the ‘concrete idea’ or *Sophia* which is the realization of the manifestation and which is fully accessible to consciousness and is how humanity can come to know the truly-existent.<sup>866</sup>

Solovyov does not elaborate further on the role of Sophia within his dialectical trinity until his seminal *Lectures on Divine-Humanity* (1878) which we shall turn to shortly. However, the basic dialectical system which has proven to be a philosophical elaboration of the proposals which he outlined in *The Sophie* remains at the heart of his future Sophiological writings

### **The Role of Sophia Within the Lectures on Divine-Humanity**

The *Lectures* were delivered in late January through to March 1878 in twelve public talks, which included a fairly high profile audience (including Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy). Within them, Solovyov continues to develop his dialectical system, but crucially, with regard to the interests of this chapter, he develops his understanding of Sophia with diligent attention and outlines her functions within his philosophical system which we shall now evaluate.

As is typical of Solovyov, he sets out to ‘prove’ the reality of an ideal world (which this time he does by appealing to Platonic Idealism and Leibniz’s Monadology) underlying physical phenomena. Furthermore, appealing to Spinoza, he suggests that the variety of ideas are contained within one single whole and are simply various modifications of this unity, which nevertheless can be distinguished:

God is all; that is to say; all in the positive sense, or the unity of all comprises the proper content, object, or objective essence of God; and that being, the actual being of God is the establishment or the positing of this content, of this essence; and in it, the assertion of him who posits, or the extant one.<sup>867</sup>

This distinction leads Solovyov to differentiate between the essence or content of God’s being (the all) and God himself ‘the possessor of the content’ or the subject: ‘we have to distinguish the expresser from the expressed.’<sup>868</sup> Within this distinction of subject and content, Solovyov elucidates his triune dialectic which contains three stages:

In this first status, all is contained in God, i.e., in the divine subject...here, all as totality is not distinguished *actually*, but exists only as a possibility...In other words, in that first status only, as

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<sup>866</sup> Ibid, p.140.

<sup>867</sup> Vladimir Solovyov, *Lectures on Godmanhood* (trans: Peter Zouboff), Semantron Press, 2007, p.130.

<sup>868</sup> Ibid, p.131.

the extant one, is God actual; whereas his content – all or the universal essence – exists only in a latent state.<sup>869</sup>

However, without the actualization of this latent state God would simply not exist, thus he must posit this content and realize it beyond its mere possibility: ‘God not only must contain it in himself, but must assert it for himself, i.e., He must assert it as the “other one.”’<sup>870</sup> Thus, like Hegel, Solovyov appears to dialectically move from a complete abstraction equated with nothing to its determinate opposite. Therefore, the antithesis of the One is now required for the advancement of the dialectic: ‘the absolutely-extant which itself is not subject to any determination, determines itself by manifesting itself as the unconditionally one through the positing of its “other one”, or its content i.e., all.’<sup>871</sup> The projection of this other, reflexively invites the third and final stage that will complete the dialectic ‘one in which it has the aspect of a finished, completed unity: or the absolute which has asserted itself as such.’<sup>872</sup> Hence, the dialectic is completed, the result is an affirmation of what was already there, only now posited for itself. Within this process, one is able to identify three different activities within the same absolute subject, and since they cannot be considered in succession, they must be posited at the same time, which Solovyov believes requires three different hypostases to constitute the divine subject:

It is necessary to assume for these three eternal acts three eternal subjects (hypostases), the second of which being immediately begotten by the first, is the direct image of its hypostasis, expresses by its actuality the essential content of the first, serves for it as the eternal expression or the word; while the third, proceeding from the first, as from the one who has already found its expression in the second, asserts the second as expressed or in expression.<sup>873</sup>

Proceeding from Solovyov’s Trinity, one is then able to detect three modes or faculties within the Absolute that correspond to one of the trinities he outlined in the *Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge*: the will (which is the will to manifest itself), the perception or knowledge (that which represents the will to manifest and perceives it), and in the mutual interaction between will and perception we get feeling. Each of these faculties in turn suggests the respective qualities goodness, truth, and beauty: the will desires to manifest itself which is good, the perception acknowledges itself which is the truth, and it also feels this interaction which is

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<sup>869</sup> Ibid.

<sup>870</sup> Ibid.

<sup>871</sup> Ibid, p.134.

<sup>872</sup> Ibid.

<sup>873</sup> Ibid, p.138.

beautiful. These distinctions posit the three modes of being within the expression: Spirit, Mind, and Soul, all of which is held together by the result of the dialectical process ‘the idea of the ideas’ which is represented by love.<sup>874</sup> He then attempts to locate this entire dialectic within a Christian idiom that Solovyov, like Schelling, believes the world has moved towards, passing through various religions and philosophies to produce the idea of the ‘divine human’ which is the culmination of a ‘mythological process’ that sees the Absolute express itself for itself.

Undoubtedly, the most significant tenet of Christianity for Solovyov is the notion of the Incarnation.<sup>875</sup> According to Solovyov’s dialectic, the most universal and abstract being must necessarily also become the most individual being, in so far as dialectical logic requires positions to be conditioned by their opposites; to posit universal being is to posit individual and determinate being, to the extent that one is defined in opposition to the other and actually produces this other within itself dialectically. Thus, Solovyov reasons that: ‘the universal organism, which expresses the unconditional content of the divine beginning [the Logos or Manifestation], is pre-eminently a particular individual being.’<sup>876</sup> Solovyov is restating the division that he drew, in his *Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge*, within the Absolute’s manifestation of itself, the Logos, which was divided into the two ideal possibilities of its manifestation to its realized manifestation or the concrete idea, which Solovyov termed Sophia. Within this current explanation, the individual being as the realized possibility of the abstract manifestation is in fact the historical Jesus or Sophia: ‘this individual being, or the realized expression of the unconditionally- extant God, is Christ.’<sup>877</sup> Thus, Christ literally becomes the locus of all of the Absolute’s content, both in its ideal universality and in its concrete individuality, and uniting the two in himself:

In the divine organism of Christ, the acting, unifying beginning, the beginning which expresses the unity of the unconditionally-extant one, obviously is the word or Logos. The unity of the second kind, the produced unity, in Christian theosophy bares the name of Sophia.<sup>878</sup>

Solovyov also refers to Sophia as the ‘concrete idea,’ ‘the body of God,’ ‘the matter of divinity,’ the ‘world-soul,’ and the ‘ideal humanity.’

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<sup>874</sup> Ibid, p.148.

<sup>875</sup> It is important to note that Solovyov is not really interested in the historical Jesus of Nazareth, but simply in the idea of divine-humanity that he represents (see: Ibid, p.152).

<sup>876</sup> Ibid, p.154.

<sup>877</sup> Ibid.

<sup>878</sup> Ibid.

In an attempt to articulate this realized manifestation of the All in the concrete Sophia, Solovyov appeals to *Proverbs 8* to contend that Sophia is the ‘ideal creation’ containing within itself all of the possibilities of the created order which constitute the ‘content of divinity;’ an ideal realm composed of various triads of being: including willing, perception, and feeling; goodness, truthfulness, and beauty, and spirit, mind, and soul; all of which make up the monistic divine world which has clear similarities to the Valentinian Pleroma:

Thus to God, as the integral being, together with unity belongs plurality – the plurality of substantial ideas, i.e., of potencies or forces with definite special content. These forces, each possessing its own particular definitive content, related in a different manner to the content of the others, necessarily represent secondary wholes or spheres. They all constitute one divine world.<sup>879</sup>

However, just as Solovyov discovered in *The Sophie*, whenever such an ideal monistic reality is narrated, one inevitably then must confront the ‘problem of finitude’ which Solovyov immediately faces, having outlined this notion of a perfect Pleroma, for it now ‘presents itself to the mind as that which by itself ought to be, as the normal.’ However, the finite world contradicts this sentiment, and thus his task must now be ‘the deduction of the conditional from the unconditional; the deduction of what by itself *ought not to be* from the unconditional norm.’<sup>880</sup> Solovyov proceeds to carry out this Valentinian task, precisely by appealing to the figure of Sophia.

According to Solovyov, Sophia can be equated with the ideal form of humanity which exists in God eternally as part of his own manifestation to himself.<sup>881</sup> Humanity, as a category, is presupposed by God as the object of his own manifestation. Humanity is therefore composed of two ontological modes: the individual human or transitory/necessary fact, and humanity’s essence which is dialectically opposed to the transitory person as being free and ‘necessarily eternal and all-embracing.’<sup>882</sup> Sophia contains both possibilities of humanity within her own ideal existence within God. In an attempt to account for the finite world, Solovyov explores the possibility that it may be a product of some evil activity. Evil, as encountered within the phenomenal world is begotten through egoism which disturbs the harmonious whole of the

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<sup>879</sup> Ibid, p.155-6.

<sup>880</sup> Ibid, p.158 (my emphasis).

<sup>881</sup> Ibid, p.159.

<sup>882</sup> Ibid, p.162.

natural world, however this appears to be nothing more than a pre-given state of our existence (Solovyov accepted Darwinian natural selection).<sup>883</sup> Therefore:

Evil, having no physical origin, must have a *metaphysical beginning*; the producing cause of evil may be the individual being not in his capacity as a natural, already conditioned phenomenon, but in his unconditional eternal essence, to which belongs the immediate and original will of that being.<sup>884</sup>

Thus, the origin of the phenomenal world, in its current state of egotistical evil, is to be accounted for by a fall of the ideal humanity (Sophia) from within the Solovyovenian Pleroma: ‘the primordial origin of evil may have had place only in the domain of the eternal pre-natural world.’<sup>885</sup> However, Solovyov still must account for *how* this fall has taken place. Sophia, in her capacity as ‘ideal humanity,’ contains the entire multiplicity of human possibility within herself. She is both divine and human, being contained by neither one nor the other, which gives her a relative freedom: ‘containing in herself both the divine beginning and the created being, she is not defined exclusively by either one or the other and, consequently, remains free.’<sup>886</sup> Given this relative ‘freedom’ that is a property of Sophia, she has the capacity to egotistically affirm herself, which is precisely what Solovyov claims she does, resulting in the disruption of the Pleroma and Sophia’s fall from the same:

The soul [Sophia] can detach the relative center of her life from the absolute center of the divine life, can assert herself outside of God. But thereby the soul necessarily loses her central position, falls from the all-one focus of the divine being to the circumference of multiple creation...with her self-assertion she becomes separated.<sup>887</sup>

The result of this fall is that: ‘the natural world, which has fallen away from the divine unity, appears as a chaos of disjointed elements, these elements in their loss of freedom and mechanical interaction give birth to matter,’<sup>888</sup> which in turn produces finitude and the plurality of

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<sup>883</sup> Ibid, p.166.

<sup>884</sup> Ibid, p.166, (my emphasis).

<sup>885</sup> Ibid, p.169.

<sup>886</sup> Ibid, p.173. Although Solovyov speaks of freedom and mediation here, these are both slightly misleading concepts. For the dialectic dictates that the creation and humanity are *necessary* for the divine’s own self-realization and are a part of this very process; similarly, there can be no real mediation in this scenario because, strictly speaking, no mediation is necessary, for the divine and humanity are, in essence, the same thing.

<sup>887</sup> Ibid, p.175. This notion of moving from the centre of divine unity to the peripheral multiplicity of the same is clearly reminiscent of Schelling’s same proposal of a ‘transcendental fall’ within his philosophy of mythology, see: F.W.J. Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* (trans: Mason Richey and Markus Zisselsberger), New York, State University of New York Press, 2007, pp.143-144.

<sup>888</sup> Vladimir Solovyov, *Lectures on Godmanhood* (trans: Peter Zouboff), Semantron Press, 2007, p.176.



being.<sup>889</sup> Having narrated the mythological fall of Sophia from the divine Pleroma or the All-Unity which is deeply indebted to Valentinian thought and Schelling's own reconstruction of this same narrative, Solovyov then describes the *Soteriological* aspect of his Valentinian mythology.

In an attempt to reestablish the lost unity of the monistic reality, the Logos (or the in-itself of the divine Sophia; that which remains ideally within the Pleroma within her essence) seeks to impart form on to the fallen Sophia/world soul/ideal humanity which requires this grace of deification:

By a free act of the world soul, the world united by it, fell away from divinity and fell apart within itself into the multitude of elements warring among themselves; by a long series of free acts that whole rebellious multitude must make peace among themselves and be reconciled with God, and be reborn in the form of the absolute organism.<sup>890</sup>

The coincidence of Sophia and her ideal counterpart, Logos, first occurs in the consciousness of humanity, the elemental forces of matter within the fallen world had slowly moved towards producing beings that could facilitate this reunion in its concrete reality (Solovyov's coopting of evolutionary theory), which initially occurs successfully. However, historical humanity becomes enchanted by its own freedom and seeks to exercise it in the manner that Sophia did within the Pleroma, whereby it 'loses its inner bond with the absolute being'<sup>891</sup> and engenders a second 'historical fall.' In order for this second disrupted unity to be healed, the narrative requires an Incarnation of the Logos, which history must slowly prepare itself for and teleologically move towards this culminating event, which occurs through a mythological process (deeply indebted to Schelling's own project of the same nature) that sees the world pass through various faiths, philosophies, and traditions, that culminate in Christianity and the historical Christ or the God-man:

In order that the divine beginning could really overcome the evil will and life of man, it is necessary that it appear for the soul a living personal force, able to penetrate into the soul and take possession of it; it is necessary that the divine Logos should not only influence the soul externally, but be born within the soul not limiting or enlightening it, but regenerating it...the actual union of the divine beginning with the soul also necessarily assures an individual form, i.e., the divine Logos is born as an actual individual man.<sup>892</sup>

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<sup>889</sup> Ibid, p.177.

<sup>890</sup> Ibid, p.179.

<sup>891</sup> Ibid, p.183.

<sup>892</sup> Ibid, p.188.

This Incarnation re-assumes the divine unity that Sophia had lost through deification and the ‘spiritualization of matter’ and assures that a similar fall can never take place, by the Logos conquering the disobedient or egotistical part of the human will, through his life of discipline and resistance to temptation which ultimately leads to his acceptance of his own crucifixion and thus overcomes egoism once and for all, which is an ethical task that all of humanity must seek to imitate Christ in.<sup>893</sup>

These Lectures form one of the most essential expressions of Solovyov’s Sophiology, however he later elaborates on these themes in his *Russia and the Universal Church* (1883) which shall now be considered.

### **Sophiology in *Russia and the Universal Church*.**

Solovyov draws the familiar distinction between the divine subject and his essence or content, which is his self-manifestation in the ideal possibility of creation, which is called Sophia: ‘this universal substance, or absolute unity of the whole, is the essential Wisdom of God (הַחֵכְמָה/Σοφία). Possessing in itself the latent potentiality of all things.’<sup>894</sup> Sophia as the ideal unity within God, dialectically implies her opposite of a potential state ‘outside of God’ which is antinomically consisted of plurality and division: ‘this is indeterminate and anarchic plurality, the chaos or the *ἄπειρον* of the Greeks, the German *Schlechte Unendlichkeit*, the *תוהו* and *בוהו* of the Bible.’<sup>895</sup> In a markedly Schellingian proposal, Solovyov claims that ‘this antithesis of the Divine Being is from all eternity suppressed and reduced to that state of pure potentiality.’<sup>896</sup> However, if the Absolute is to be the true Absolute, then he must overcome this irrational antitype of himself and reduce it to nothingness by assimilating it into his own unity.<sup>897</sup>

The Godhead must be able to meet every manifestation of rebellious chaos not only with an act of force suppressing the contrary act, not only with a reason or an idea convicting it of falsity and excluding it from true being, but also with a grace penetrating and transforming it and so drawing it back to unity.<sup>898</sup>

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<sup>893</sup> Ibid, p194.

<sup>894</sup> Vladimir Solovyev, *Russia and the Universal Church* (trans: Herbert Rees), London, Centenary Press, p.156.

<sup>895</sup> Ibid, p.157.

<sup>896</sup> Ibid, p.157.

<sup>897</sup> Ibid, p.158.

<sup>898</sup> Ibid, p.158.

Hence, the Absolute must respond to this chaos through the threefold approach of suppression, persuasion, and transformation: ‘this threefold victorious reaction of the divine principle against potential chaos is the inner eternal manifestation of the Absolute substance of God or of the essential Wisdom which, as we have seen, is all in unity.’<sup>899</sup> Although God has an ideal victory over chaos in his *essential* being, he has not yet achieved the same end in the ‘reality’ of chaos itself, so in order for this to occur, God must separate chaos from himself which produces the foundations of the earth.<sup>900</sup> This new ‘externality’ to God then acquires a hypostatic reality which is driven by its desire to oppose God and his unity: ‘an urge implies a will, and a will implies a psychical subject, that is to say a soul.’<sup>901</sup> This world-soul now becomes the antithesis of Wisdom an inverted Wisdom that constituted the substance or content of all that is external to God. Following the narrative of the *Lectures*, Solovyov contends that this principle has its own freedom and is faced with two possibilities:

The world-soul has a twofold and variable character: it can will to exist for itself outside of God, it can take the false point of view of chaotic and anarchic existence, but it can also abase itself before God and, by freely attaching itself to the divine word, bring all creation back to perfect unity and identify itself with the eternal Wisdom.<sup>902</sup>

According to Solovyov, the world-soul is enticed by the drive of chaos although:

Having conceived chaos and given it a reality relative to itself, the soul conceives the desire for deliverance from this discordant existence of aimless and irrational agitation in an abyss of darkness. Drawn hither and thither by blind forces striving with one another for exclusive existence, rent asunder, disintegrated, reduced to a countless multitude of atoms the world-soul feels a *vague but profound desire for unity*.<sup>903</sup>

Thus, having exercised its freedom, which resulted in its isolation from the divine unity, the world-soul longs once again for its reunification with the Absolute. And, it is this very longing, according to Solovyov, which attracts the grace of the heavenly Logos who subsequently responds by imparting a new idea to the world-soul, and lays the foundations of the material world.<sup>904</sup> Solovyov further suggests that the heavenly Logos and the Holy Spirit impart further form to the exiled world-soul, which in turn produces the heavenly beings of angels, pure

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<sup>899</sup> Ibid, pp.158-9.

<sup>900</sup> Ibid, pp.160-61.

<sup>901</sup> Ibid, p.162.

<sup>902</sup> Ibid, p.163.

<sup>903</sup> Ibid.

<sup>904</sup> Ibid, p.164.

intelligences, and spirits which engenders the divide between heaven and earth.<sup>905</sup> According to Solovyov, these heavenly beings have the capacity to model themselves after the divine Wisdom or engender chaos; those who follow the latter path are the ‘fallen angels.’<sup>906</sup>

The ultimate purpose or teleology of the fallen earth, is to be re-absorbed into the divine unity. This ‘soteriological’ process has two aspects to it: the ecstatic ascending movement of the earth through the fallen world-soul’s desire to reconnect with its original unity, and the descending grace of the divine Wisdom. Similarly to the proposal of the *Lectures*, the earth teleologically evolves and moves towards the production of humanity and various religious systems that culminate in Christianity, which can facilitate the re-union through the notion of ‘divine-humanity,’ which has three perfect expressions that act as summative points to the historical process: the feminine reception of divinity in the virgin Mary, the masculine counterpart in Jesus of Nazareth, and the social product of this unity in the Church: ‘the process of universal history; and the threefold fruit which it bears is: perfect woman, or nature made divine, perfect man or the God-man, and the perfect society of God with men.’<sup>907</sup> Therefore, Solovyov’s conception of history ends when the re-unification begins with the Incarnation of the divine Word or the divine Wisdom that re-absorbs her degenerate counterpart into her own unity within the divine whole.

Therefore, it seems reasonable from these evaluations to conclude that Solovyov’s Sophiology is underpinned by Schellingian Idealism and Valentinian Gnosticism as well as other esoteric and unique patterns of thought. From the former he inherited his commitment to monism, his philosophical methodology (including his dialectic, theogony, and cosmogony), the *Valentinian philosophical problems* (including the problem of finitude and existential alienation), and the means of addressing these problems, i.e., by advocating a ‘transcendental fall’ to account for the reality that must be negated in its re-absorption back into the monistic first principle. All of these notions were already identified to be integral parts of the Valentinian structural narrative that Schelling had studied as a youth. Solovyov utilized all of these factors in the construction of his own Sophiology which he directly supplemented with Valentinian mythology, which he both admired and had studied at length. Valentinian mythology was clearly formative in constructing the theological functions that Solovyov’s Sophia performs; Sophia is utilized to explain how the

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<sup>905</sup> Ibid, p.168.

<sup>906</sup> Ibid, p.169.

<sup>907</sup> Ibid, p.175.

problem of finitude arises and how the construction of an external finite material world came into being (playing an integral role in the transcendental fall within the Absolute), and how the unity is re-established through a divine descent. Therefore, having found Solovyov's Sophiology to conform to the conventions of Valentinian Gnosticism, we shall now explore Bulgakov's adoption and adaptation of Solovyov's Sophiology, and assess to what extent these same conventions form the basis of his own Sophiological positions

### **Sergius Bulgakov's 'Sophiological Antinomism',<sup>908</sup>**

#### **Bulgakov's Journey from Orthodox Christianity to Marxism, and back to Orthodoxy via Philosophical Idealism and Solovyov.**

Sergius Nikolaevich Bulgakov was born in 1871 to an Orthodox Priest, Nikolai Bulgakov, serving at a cemetery church in Livny, and Aleksandra Azbukina. Bulgakov was, as to be expected, immersed in Orthodoxy from his early childhood, and in 1884, at the age of thirteen, entered Orel theological seminary in preparation for ministry. However, like Solovyov before him, the adolescent Bulgakov grew dissatisfied with the Orthodox faith and in 1888 left the seminary and enrolled in a secular educational institute. In 1890 he enrolled in the faculty of law in Moscow University, where he embraced Marxism and devoted his studies to politics and economics.<sup>909</sup> Following his studies, he was subsequently granted a research fellowship and traveled to Western Europe to complete his graduate dissertation (*Capitalism and Agriculture 1902*).<sup>910</sup> However, during this period his enthusiasm for Marxism started to waver as he began to rediscover the faith of his childhood, which was reignited by an experience of 'spiritual transformation' whilst viewing the Sistine Madonna in Dresden. He reminisces that:

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<sup>908</sup> 'Sophiological Antinomism' is Brandon Gallaher's phrase, like Gallaher, I believe that Bulgakov's method of doing theology 'antinomism' (which shall be explained in the course of this chapter) lies at the very centre of all of Bulgakov's theological thinking, even though he rarely makes this specifically clear. It is a point that has been desperately neglected in Bulgakov scholarship. The pioneers of this hermeneutical shift must largely be accredited to Brandon Gallaher and Jonathan Seiling, see: Brandon Gallaher, *There is Freedom: The Dialectic of freedom and Necessity in the Trinitarian Theologies of Sergii Bulgakov, Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 2010 (Ph.D Thesis, publication forthcoming: Oxford University Press), p.76; Jonathan Seiling, *From Antinomy to Sophiology: Modern Russian Religious Consciousness and Sergei N. Bulgakov's Critical Appropriation of German Idealism*, (Ph.D Thesis, 2008).

<sup>909</sup> He published several articles in this field, for instance: *On the Regularity of Social Phenomena (1896)* and *On Markets in Capitalist Conditions (1897)*.

<sup>910</sup> Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2000, pp.227-29.

My knowledge of art was perfectly insignificant and I hardly even knew what awaited me in the gallery. And there, into my soul peered the eyes of the Queen of Heaven approaching on clouds with the Pre-eternal child...I was bedside myself, my head was spinning, tears at once joyful and bitter flowed from my eyes, the ice in my heart melted and a kind of knot in my life came undone. This was not an aesthetic emotion...it was...a *miracle*...I was still a Marxist then and I involuntarily called this contemplation *a prayer*, and every morning, aiming to find myself in the *Zwinger* before anyone else, I ran there, *to pray*.<sup>911</sup>

Bulgakov returned to Russia in 1900 and his experiences in Europe had undoubtedly left their mark on him. Although he did not immediately return to the Orthodox faith, his Marxism quickly subsided and was replaced, like so many of Bulgakov's contemporaries, by a growing commitment to German Idealism. This cultural turn is reflected in the 1902 publication of *Problems of Idealism*, which was a series of essays produced by a distinguished group of Russian intellectuals, including Semen Frank, Nikolai Berdiaev, and Bulgakov himself, amongst others.<sup>912</sup> According to Paul Valliere: 'for this group idealism meant the trenchant and principled rejection of all forms of positivism and philosophical materialism. *Problems of Idealism* was designed to overturn the worldview of the Russian radical intelligentsia.'<sup>913</sup> This personal intellectual shift in Bulgakov is documented in his 1903 *From Marxism to Idealism*<sup>914</sup> and opens up previously forbidden paths of inquiry for the materialist Marxist ('metaphysical questions – God, immortality, good and evil, and the like'<sup>915</sup>). Bulgakov's intellectual and spiritual journey had, in many respects, mirrored Solovyov's, and it is therefore no surprise that he starts to read him in 1902 as a natural progression from his move to Idealism. Indeed, he devotes one of his essays in *From Marxism to Idealism* to Solovyov, where he characterizes his thought as: 'a balanced and harmonious synthesis of modern thought and knowledge, an integral worldview in which the demands of critical philosophy, metaphysical creativity and natural science are all

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<sup>911</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2012, pp.9-10; see also Bulgakov's reflections in the autobiographical *Tikhie dumy (1911-15)*.

<sup>912</sup> See: S.N. Bulgakov, 'Basic Problems of the Theory of Progress', in: Randall A. Poole (ed and trans), *Problems of Idealism: Essays in Russian Social Philosophy*, Yale University Press, 2003, pp.85-124.

<sup>913</sup> Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2000, p.231.

<sup>914</sup> See: Sergei Bulgakov, *Ot marksizma k idealizmu: sbornik statei (1896-1903)*, Frankfurt am Main, Posev, 1968. For Bulgakov's theological assessment of Marx see: S.N. Bulgakov, *Karl Marx as a Religious Type: His Relation to the Religion of Anthropotheism of L. Feuerbach* (trans: Luba Barna), Massachusetts, Nordland, 1979.

<sup>915</sup> Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2000, p.231.

taken into account and harmonized.<sup>916</sup> Following the 1905 revolution, Bulgakov remained politically active and was elected to the second Duma (following the 1905 reforms) from the Orel region in 1907.<sup>917</sup> Bulgakov was a liberal and closely affiliated with the Constitutional Democratic Party, although he stood independently.<sup>918</sup> However, after the dissolution of the Duma, Bulgakov no longer pursued a career in politics and was readmitted into the sacramental life of the Orthodox Church in the same year.<sup>919</sup> In 1909 Bulgakov had an essay, entitled *Heroism and Humility*, published in the influential book *Landmarks*, written by a group of leading liberal intellectuals, who sought to re-promote Christianity within Russian intellectual life.<sup>920</sup> He was now in no doubt that his future academic endeavours would need to be informed by the Christian faith. This shift also coincided with the immense personal tragedy that Bulgakov's family suffered – losing their four year old son Ivashechka. In some autobiographical digressions in his *Unfading Light* (1917), Bulgakov describes a profound mystical experience that occurred during his son's funeral, which appears to have marked his unwavering return to the Orthodox faith from dogmatic Marxism.<sup>921</sup>

It is shortly after the difficulties of 1909 that Bulgakov first began to seriously engage with Solovyov's Sophiology.<sup>922</sup> It is clear that at these early stages that he embraces Solovyov's conception of Sophia and Schellingian philosophy, rather uncritically, and utilizes them both in his attempts to provide an 'ontology for social economy' in, what is generally considered to be his first Sophiological work: *The Philosophy of Economy* (1912). Later in Bulgakov's short introduction to Sophiology: *Sophia, the Wisdom of God: An outline of Sophiology* (1937), he

<sup>916</sup> Sergei. Bulgakov, 'Chto daet sovremennomu sozaniu filosofii Vladimira Solov'eva?', in: Sergei Bulgakov, *Ot marksizma k idealizmu: sbornik statei (1896-1903)*, Frankfurt am Main, Posev, 1968, p.238; cited in: Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2000, p.239.

<sup>917</sup> Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2000, p.241.

<sup>918</sup> On Bulgakov's early political views see: Bastiaan Wielenga, *Lenins Weg zur Revolution: Eine Konfrontation mit Sergej Bulgakov und Peter Struve im interesse einer theologischen Besinnung*, Munich, Kaiser Verlag, 1971, pp.241-65; Catherine Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy (1890-1920)*, Cornell University Press, 1997, pp.101-14.

<sup>919</sup> Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2000, p.242.

<sup>920</sup> See: Marshall S. Shatz and Judith E. Zimmerman (eds and trans), *Vekhi: Landmarks: A Collection of Articles about the Russian Intelligentsia*, M.E. Sharpe, 1994.

<sup>921</sup> For Bulgakov's own account of this experience see: Sergius Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations* (trans: Thomas Allan Smith), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2012, pp.15-16.

<sup>922</sup> See Bulgakov's 1910 essay entitled: 'Priroda v filosofii VL. Solov'eva' where he engages with the notion of Sophia as a 'world soul' that is inherent within the 'historical process' of the world.

rehearses a more cautious assessment of Solovyov, acknowledging that ‘Solovyov’s doctrine of Sophia is undoubtedly syncretistic: side by side with ancient Orthodox tradition we can detect elements derived from the ancient Gnostic systems.’<sup>923</sup> He then goes on to claim that although he regards Solovyov as his ‘philosophical guide to Christ’ ‘personally, though I do not share his Gnostic tendencies.’<sup>924</sup> This is a claim that we shall seek to assess in the following evaluation of Bulgakov’s Sophiology beginning with his 1912 *Philosophy of Economy*.

### **Schelling, Solovyov, and Valentinian Gnosticism in Bulgakov’s Sophiology in the Philosophy of Economy.**

In essence, the *Philosophy of Economy* is a critique of Neo-Kantianism<sup>925</sup> and dogmatic Marxist materialism, two popular trends of thought in twentieth century Russia. He attempts to offer an alternative to these strains of philosophy, by providing an ‘ontological foundation for social economy’ patterned on Schelling’s philosophy of nature and Solovyov’s conception of Sophia. For the purposes of this evaluation, we must focus on Bulgakov’s use of the figure of Sophia.

Bulgakov’s initial motives for adopting the figure of Sophia are born out of his Idealist critique of Kantian thought and his commitment to Schelling’s conception of the ‘world-soul’, which he synonymizes with Solovyov’s Sophia, in an attempt to supplement Kant.<sup>926</sup> In order for human social economy to be possible, Bulgakov acknowledges that we must be able to posit a ‘single true transcendental subject of economic activity,’<sup>927</sup> which must in turn be humanity as a whole. However, in the wake of Kant, how can such a noumenal entity be affirmed? According to Bulgakov, Kant’s epistemological theory of human cognition suffers from some major defects that could arguably be said to undermine his entire philosophical enterprise. Offering a slightly modified version of Jacobi’s critique of Kant, Bulgakov contends that the cognitive process that Kant’s thought is built upon must belong to a human subject; however, this could hardly be a

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<sup>923</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *Sophia, the Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*, Steiner Books, 1993, p.9.

<sup>924</sup> Ibid, p.10.

<sup>925</sup> On ‘Neo-Kantianism see, for instance: Konstantin Pollor, ‘The Transcendental Method: On the Reception of the Critique of Pure Reason in Neo-Kantianism’, in: Paul Guyer (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp.346-380; for its influence in twentieth century Russian thought see: *Studies in East European Thought* 47 (3-4) Dec 1995; V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy II* (trans: George Kline), London, Routledge, 1953, pp.677-706.

<sup>926</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Philosophy of Economy: The World as Household* (trans: Catherine Evtuhov), Yale University Press, 2000, p.93.

<sup>927</sup> Ibid, p.126.



particular individual subject, as Kant would be unable to elevate this one empirical instance of human cognition to a universal theory, but neither could he appeal to some ‘transcendental ego’ which, if known, would already undermine Kant’s epistemology in so far as an ‘in itself’ would have been comprehended. These observations lead Bulgakov to the conclusion that Kant’s ‘subject,’ which is the foundation of his philosophy, is a ‘methodological fiction’ which if used to found a theory of knowledge would be akin to ‘hammering a nail into thin air.’<sup>928</sup> Bulgakov attempts to remedy these lacunas in Kant, by suggesting that in order for his thought to work, we must affirm a ‘general transcendental subject:’ ‘a general theory of knowledge is impossible unless we make the leap toward acknowledging the existence of a general transcendental subject.’<sup>929</sup> The significance of this realization is that Kant’s epistemology requires an accompanying ontology which his theory seems unable to provide, thus there is a natural return to the metaphysics that Kant thought he had dispelled.<sup>930</sup> Thus, philosophy requires an ideal humanity that is realized in individual human subjects; Bulgakov believes that Schelling and Solovyov’s monism is the only way forward: ‘only one knows, but many engage in the process of cognition. This one, this transcendental subject of knowledge, is not the human individual but humanity as a whole.’<sup>931</sup>

This monistic ideal pan-humanity is quickly identified with Schelling’s ‘world soul’, Solovyov’s Sophia, an ‘ideal organism’, a ‘metaphysical forefather’, and simply ‘the Pleroma’ - Bulgakov uses the names interchangeably at this stage.<sup>932</sup> Therefore, ‘Man can attain knowledge in his capacity as the eye of the world soul insofar as he carries within himself the rays of the Pleroma of the divine Sophia.’<sup>933</sup> And, furthermore, ‘this original, metaphysical unity of humanity is a positive spiritual force acting in the world as a unifying principle.’<sup>934</sup> However, as we have consistently seen in our studies, when such an ‘original ideal unity’ is upheld, one inevitably faces the Valentinian ‘problem of finitude’ i.e., ‘why is there a finite world at all which exists in alienation from this original whole?’ Like Valentinus, Schelling, and Solovyov before him, Bulgakov must now recourse to a mythological narrative of a metaphysical fall that

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<sup>928</sup> Ibid, p.128.

<sup>929</sup> Ibid.

<sup>930</sup> Ibid.

<sup>931</sup> Ibid, p.130, 132, 139.

<sup>932</sup> Ibid.

<sup>933</sup> Ibid, p.131.

<sup>934</sup> Ibid, p.140.

explains the present state of the world. Bulgakov, realizing the logical direction of his thought, is forced to pose these questions to himself: ‘why does our empirical reality remain alienated from Sophia...How can we explain such a state of things? What hypothesis (not scientific of course, but metaphysical) would render it comprehensible?’<sup>935</sup> Bulgakov’s response is typical of what we have encountered in previous thinkers:

The current stage of struggle...is comprehensible only as a violation of Sophia’s primordial unity, in which the metaphysical center of being becomes displaced and a general illness of being results; this decentralization results in the world’s being plunged into the process of becoming, of subjection to time, to contradictions, evolution, economy. The chaotic state of the empirical world is the result of a *falling away* from the Sophic world in its complete and absolute harmony, where everything finds itself in everything else and ultimately God, through that timeless metaphysical act that in religion is known as original sin.<sup>936</sup>

Following Schelling, Bulgakov suggests that this ‘metaphysical fall’ or ‘primordial catastrophe’ is not an historical, but a metaphysical event that is the product of a primordial self-affirming will.<sup>937</sup> This primordial ‘splitting’ of the Absolute whole or Sophia requires a certain duplicity within her own being which invites the narration of two Sophias - ontologically identical, but modally alienated from each other: ‘a heavenly, timeless Sophia and an empirical Sophia.’<sup>938</sup> This appears to mimic the Valentinian distinction between Sophia and *Achamoth*. And, like the Valentinian narrative, Bulgakov affirms that this alienated Sophia must be reunited with her heavenly counterpart, which occurs through the historical process which is directed by a teleological drive to re-establish the original harmony.<sup>939</sup>

As a slight digression, it is important to note that there is a sub plot to Bulgakov’s Sophiological fall narrative that has a lot to do with his rejection of death. Despite death being a constant presence in Bulgakov’s early childhood (his father’s ministry was in a cemetery church) and it being no stranger to his adult life given the loss of his four year old son, he is never shy of reminding his readers of its alien status with regard to the original intention of God’s creation.<sup>940</sup>

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<sup>935</sup> Ibid, p.149.

<sup>936</sup> Ibid, pp.149-50 (my emphasis).

<sup>937</sup> Ibid, p.150.

<sup>938</sup> Ibid, p.151.

<sup>939</sup> Ibid, pp.152-53.

<sup>940</sup> See especially: his reasons for rejecting the Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception: Sergius Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush* (trans: Thomas Allan Smith), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2009. The fact that Mary dies after having been miraculously exempted from original sin indicates to Bulgakov that this could not have been the case given death’s unnatural presence in ‘pre-lapsarian creation.’

Thus, in the wake of Darwin (where death is seemingly one major and necessary component in constituting our own current existence) and in his rejection of the Biblicist reading of the Genesis creation narrative, Bulgakov's theology needs to have humanity 'before,' as it were, humanity has evolved, which leads him into metaphysical/anthropological theories of a fall of this pre-human humanity, in order to explain death and evolution as a negative and 'unnecessary process' not ordained by God. These requirements certainly lend themselves to Gnostic speculation.<sup>941</sup>

Therefore, having outlined Bulgakov's conception of Sophia in his early *Philosophy of Economy* and having demonstrated its dependency on Schelling, Solovyov, and Valentinian mythology, we shall now explore Bulgakov's further adaptations of this narrative in his second major Sophiological work, *The Unfading Light* (1917).

### **Sophia as a Personified Antinomy and Bulgakov's Remodeling of the Gnostic Narrative.**

Bulgakov's second major Sophiological work, *The Unfading Light*, marks his first attempt to refine his early sapiential speculations; largely, by consciously moving away from the sources that underpinned the *Philosophy of Economy* (Schelling and Solovyov) and by rejecting the explicit references to the Gnostic narrative that he had earlier embraced. Thus, we begin to encounter a very different emphasis in Bulgakov's theology, which is seemingly committed to apophaticism, for instance: 'faith presupposes mystery as its object and at the same time its source.'<sup>942</sup> This turn further inspires sharp critiques and dismissals of individuals, such as Hegel, Schelling, and Solovyov, who were pivotal to his earlier thinking.<sup>943</sup> However, despite these

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<sup>941</sup> Even David Bentley Hart acknowledges the attractiveness of certain Gnostic theories when faced with the horror of death: 'like Paul or the author of John's Gospel, the Gnostics understood spiritual liberation as something subversive of the order of "this cosmos," a manumission from the sway of the ancient terrestrial and celestial powers, a glorious escape from the kingdom of death. Any Christian who has not felt at least an occasional stirring of the pathos of Gnosticism...and of a rage against the fashion of this world, and of a mysterious yearning for another and perfect world, at once strange and familiar, cannot in all likelihood appreciate the spiritual and moral sensibility of the New Testament' (David Bentley Hart, *The Doors of the Sea: Where was God in the Tsunami?*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2005, p.95).

<sup>942</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations* (trans: Thomas Allan Smith), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2012, p.31.

<sup>943</sup> He says of Hegel: 'metaphysical Gnosticism received its most extreme expression in the philosophy of Hegel. Hegelian panlogism is at the same time the most radical immanentism known to the history of thought' (Ibid, p.35). Similarly, of his once beloved Schelling he now writes that 'for all his profundity and exegetical skill one has to acknowledge that Schelling introduces opinions about Divinity and the Holy Trinity that are completely inadmissible for Christianity...a sad attempt of presumptuous speculation...this is rationalistic lack of taste, which one would least of all want to see in Schelling, and he has paid for it not only with heresy but also with contradiction of his own self' (Ibid, pp.201-2). And of Solovyov he writes that 'in general [he] sins by the excessive rationalism in

critiques his dependency on the above thinkers remains strong throughout his entire theological career.

Having distanced himself from his earlier endeavours, Bulgakov briefly outlines his 'new' theological methodology that inspired this shift in his thought, and which is fundamental to his Sophiology from here on. He claims that at the heart of the religious consciousness is the antinomy between God as transcendent mystery and God who is relative and immanent to creation: 'if we translate this fundamental and elementary fact of religious consciousness into the language of religious philosophy, we will see immediately that before us is a clearly contradictory combination of concepts, leading to antinomy.'<sup>944</sup> Bulgakov is quick to distinguish a theological antinomy from a simple logical contradiction (a mistake) and from a dialectical contradiction that is to be surpassed by synthesis.<sup>945</sup> In contrast to these two possibilities, he states: 'antinomy is completely different. It is generated by the recognized inadequacy of thinking to its subject or its tasks; it reveals the insufficiency of the powers of human reason which is compelled to stop at a certain point.'<sup>946</sup> He later expands on this definition claiming that: 'an antinomy simultaneously admits the truth of two contradictory, logically incompatible, but ontologically equally necessary assertions. An antinomy testifies to the existence of a mystery beyond which the human reason cannot penetrate. This mystery, nevertheless, is actualized and realized in religious experience.'<sup>947</sup> There is much to unpack and clarify in these statements on his theological method that appears to be informed by his close friend and mentor Pavel Florensky (1882-1937).<sup>948</sup>

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his theology' (Ibid, p.152). See, also his various critiques in: S.N. Bulgakov, *Die Trägodie der Philosophie*, Darmstadt, Verlag, 1927.

<sup>944</sup> Ibid, p.104.

<sup>945</sup> Ibid, p.105; on this distinction see also: Sergius Bulgakov, *Sophia, the Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*, Steiner Books, 1993, p.77.

<sup>946</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations* (trans: Thomas Allan Smith), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2012, p.105.

<sup>947</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *Sophia, the Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*, Steiner Books, 1993, p.77.

<sup>948</sup> Philosophical Antinomism is an epistemological theory of Florensky's that he first outlined (albeit briefly) in the letter on 'contradiction' in his *Magnum Opus: The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: an Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters* (1914); see: Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: an Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters* (trans: Boris Jakim), New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1997. He appeals to thinkers as diverse as Heraclitus, Plato, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and above all Nicholas of Cusa, as his inspiration for his proposal. Put simply, for Florensky, truth can only be obtained in finite thought 'if it foresees, so to speak, all objections to itself and answers them' (Ibid, p.109). How is this possible? Truth must embrace its own negation and doubt within itself *a priori* and accept them, thus apparently overcoming any objections to its truthfulness by encompassing all possible responses to this claim which are included in its own negation. Therefore, truth has the

Firstly, at the heart of antinomical thinking is a primordial distinction within God himself: God as Absolute and God as Absolute-relative. This basic antinomy within God, which he calls the ‘self-bifurcation of the Absolute,’<sup>949</sup> reflexively generates two others which he conveniently outlines in a table in his 1931 *The Icon and its Veneration*:

### **I. Theological Antinomy (God in Himself)**

THESIS: God is the Absolute and, consequently the pure NOT, the Divine Nothing (Apophatic Theology).

ANTITHESIS: God is the Absolute-in-itself self-relation, the Holy Trinity (Kataphatic theology).

### **II. Cosmological Antinomy (God in Himself and in Creation)**

THESIS: God in the Holy Trinity has all fullness and all bliss; he is self-existent, unchanging, eternal, and therefore absolute (God in Himself).

ANTITHESIS: God creates the world out of love for creation, with its temporal, relative, becoming being, and becomes for it God, correlates Himself with it (God in creation).

### **III. Sophiological Antinomy (Divine Wisdom in God and in the world)**

THESIS: God, unsubstantial in the Holy trinity, reveals Himself in His Wisdom, which is His Divine life and the Divine world in eternity, fullness and perfection (non-creaturely-Sophia – Divinity in God)

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appearance of self-contradiction: ‘the thesis and the antithesis together form the expression of truth. In other words, truth is an antinomy, and it cannot fail to be such’ (Ibid). Florensky attempts to deduce a formula for the theory of antinomy by way of symbolic logic and concludes with: ‘ $P = (P \cap \neg P) \cap V$ .’ Thus,  $P = V$  (*veritas/truth*) which includes  $P$  and  $\neg P$  (Ibid, p.113). However, Florensky concedes that in its appearance an antinomy is indistinguishable from a mundane logical contradiction (a squared circle), the only difference is that an antinomy is endorsed by the Church in its dogma, which one must choose to accept through an act of rational kenosis or intellectual asceticism. The best account of Florensky’s thought and his antinomical epistemology is still: Robert Slesinski, *Pavel Florensky: A Metaphysics of Love*, New York, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984, pp.79-120. For an excellent assessment of Florensky’s biography see: Avril Pyman, *Pavel Florensky: A Quiet Genius: The Tragic and Extraordinary Life of Russia’s Unknown Da Vinci*, Bloomsbury, 2010.

<sup>949</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations* (trans: Thomas Allan Smith), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2012, p.184. At certain points, Bulgakov seems to believe that this Sophiological distinction is akin to the Palamite distinction between God’s essence and his energies; thus he writes: ‘we have on the one hand, the complete incomprehensibility (transcendence) of the Godhead in its essence (*ousia*), but at the same time the Absolute reveals itself, it becomes God for the world in its activity (*energeia*)’ (Brandon Gallaher and Irina Kukota, ‘Protopresbyter Sergii Bulgakov: Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to the Unfading Light,’ in: *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 49:1-2 (2005), pp.5-46, p.17, see also: p.23).

ANTITHESIS: God creates the world by His Wisdom, and this Wisdom, constituting the divine foundation of the world, abides in temporal spatial becoming, submerged in non-being (creaturely Sophia – Divinity outside of God, in the world).<sup>950</sup>

All three dimensions are aspects of the same fundamental antinomy of God as transcendent and God as immanent. The antinomical method is essentially, following Schelling, a further attempt to do theology after and independently of Hegel (a modern post-modern theology), where Bulgakov attempts to uphold difference within unity, even when this would suggest logical contradiction, which seems to be grounded in Chalcedonian Christology. Therefore, at first glance, providing one probes no further than the surface, Bulgakov has escaped the Gnostic narrative that characterized the Sophiology of the *Philosophy of Economy*, for in the wake of the affirmation of antinomy, Bulgakov does not need to explain finitude in the shadow of the monistic whole, neither does finitude contradict the Absolute (therefore, no longer requiring a metaphysical fall to narrate its existence) the antinomy affirms both God and the world simultaneously. And, even if this may appear to be a logical contradiction, it certainly cannot be a mistake, given that it is revealed and resolved in religious experience.<sup>951</sup>

According to Bulgakov, God ‘steps out of his transcendence and absoluteness into immanence.’<sup>952</sup> However, given that there is no ‘outside’ to Bulgakov’s monistic God, creation must therefore relate to God within God or be part of God’s own self-relation.<sup>953</sup> The creation of the world (as in Hegel) therefore begins to look like a form of self-determination that Bulgakov characteristically describes in terms of Kenosis.<sup>954</sup>

Alongside the Absolute which is super-essentially, being appears in which the Absolute discloses itself as creator, is revealed in it, is realized in it, and participates in being, and in this sense the world is God in process...in creating the world God thereby flings himself into creation.<sup>955</sup>

Hence, the antinomy is clear:

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<sup>950</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *Icons and the Name of God* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2012, pp.35-6.

<sup>951</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations* (trans: Thomas Allan Smith), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2012, p.110.

<sup>952</sup> Ibid.

<sup>953</sup> Ibid, p.154.

<sup>954</sup> Ibid, p.185. A major theme in his Trinitarian theology, Christology, creation theology, Pneumatology, Mariology, Angelology, ethics and nearly every aspect of his thought, for a simple outline of his kenotic thought see his 1924 sermon ‘The power of the Cross: On the Exaltation of the Lord’s Cross’, in: Sergius Bulgakov, *Churchly Joy: Orthodox Devotions for the Church Year* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2008, pp.1-7.

<sup>955</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations* (trans: Thomas Allan Smith), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2012, p.196.

God is an unchanging entity, wholly satisfied and wholly blessed, and the world process neither adds anything to him nor subtracts anything from him. But at the same time God is also creator of the world. He lives and acts in the world...consequently God himself becomes in the world and through the world, he is subject to the process, and one can thus say that God is not complete insofar as the world is not complete.<sup>956</sup>

When faced with an antinomy the task of theology, according to Bulgakov, is to neither reject nor solve it but to 'lay it bare.' This is precisely where the figure of Sophia comes in. No longer will she be used as she was in the *Philosophy of Economy*, but now as a personification of the antinomy between God as Absolute and Absolute relative and God and the world, in essence to mediate the antinomy by expressing its difference in unity.

According to Bulgakov, the self-bifurcation of God generates two related, yet distinct aspects within God himself:

In setting alongside itself the extra-divine world, the divinity thereby places between itself and the world a certain border and this border, which according to the concept itself is found between God and the world, the creator and the creature, is itself neither the one nor the other but something completely particular, simultaneously uniting the one and the other.<sup>957</sup>

Thus, in the production of the world, a *metaxu* is posited in relation to God and the world; a boundary where the world meets God and is united with him, yet is simultaneously distinguished from him; something akin to an ontological 'cross-over point.' Bulgakov hypostasizes and personifies this *metaxu* as Sophia: 'occupying the place between God and the world, Sophia abides between being and super-being; she is neither the one nor the other, or appears as both at once.'<sup>958</sup> At this stage, most likely under the influence of Florensky, Sophia is given a hypostatic quality that comes close to 'quaternitizing' the Trinity, which Bulgakov is forced to qualify after the publication of the *Unfading Light*.<sup>959</sup>

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<sup>956</sup> Ibid.

<sup>957</sup> Ibid, p.217.

<sup>958</sup> Ibid, p.219.

<sup>959</sup> He does this in a short treatise: *Ipostas' i Ipostasnost* (1925) where he attempts to draw a distinction between Person (hypostasis) which is used of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and *Ipostasnost* (hypostaticity) which is the possibility to be hypostasized i.e., to be the life of personality. It is neither a concrete personality nor an abstract essence detached from personal life. Thus, Sophia is not a fourth hypostasis somehow added to the divine Trinity, but the divine life of the Persons which is characterized by Sophia: 'in the realm of Spirit, along with the hypostasis, and its nature, is determined still one more possible state – hypostaticity. This is the capacity to hypostasize oneself, to belong to a hypostasis, to be its disclosure, to give oneself up to it' (Brandon Gallaher and Irina Kukota, 'Protopresbyter Sergii Bulgakov: Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to the Unfading Light,' in: *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 49:1-2 (2005), pp.5-46, p.17, see also: p.28).

The divine triunity, God-love, in its closed, self-sufficient, eternal act of divine, substantial love exteriorizes...the object of this divine love, loves it, and thus pours out on it the life creating power of trihypostatic love. Of course this object of love is not only an abstract idea or a dead mirror, it can only be a living essence, *having person, hypostasis*. And this love is Sophia.<sup>960</sup>

Bulgakov does not aid matters by adopting Florensky's controversial phrase 'fourth hypostasis' to characterize Sophia.<sup>961</sup> In essence, the divine life of the Trinity condescends to include within itself Sophia as the world-soul, ideal creation, ideal humanity, or all-unity as a feminine 'receptive' principle existing within God himself.

However, even with the antinomical affirmation of God and the world, 'the problem of finitude' still appears to haunt Bulgakov's narrative (we shall shortly explore why this is the case), for this world still appears to be in contradiction to its ideal Sophianic state: 'one has to simultaneously affirm that the world is Sophia in its foundation and is not Sophia in its condition.'<sup>962</sup> However, at this stage, Bulgakov resists the temptation to re-posit a metaphysical fall narrative to explain this ontological duplicity existing within Sophia herself, instead he draws the distinction between Sophia in potential and the ideal Sophia as *entelechy* to be realized within the historical process, that is the transition between Sophia in potential to realized Sophia: 'in the religious process, which constitutes the essence of the world's history, it is a matter of salvation from the world, humanity's recovery of God.'<sup>963</sup>

Therefore, we have noted the transition that affects Bulgakov's Sophiology in the *Unfading Light* and its distinction from his earlier conceptions of Sophia; here Sophia becomes the hypostasized *metaxu* existing *between* God and the world, which is grounded in the theological methodology of *antinomism*. This shift in Bulgakov's approach to theology is central, yet remarkably difficult to identify (as Bulgakov never provides a detailed account and acknowledgement of his 'methodology', there are only scattered references and its constant presence in the background of his theology), despite its centrality to Bulgakov's entire theological output. We noted some of its characteristics and accredited it with removing some of

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<sup>960</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations* (trans: Thomas Allan Smith), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2012, p.217 (my emphasis).

<sup>961</sup> Ibid, p.217; for Florensky's notion of Sophia see: Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: an Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters* (trans: Boris Jakim), New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1997, pp.231-84.

<sup>962</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations* (trans: Thomas Allan Smith), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2012, p.229.

<sup>963</sup> Ibid, p.328.



the narrative structures in Bulgakov's Sophiology that had previously necessitated Gnostic mythology. *On the surface*, the antinomical method allows Bulgakov to simultaneously affirm God as transcendent Absolute *whilst* acknowledging God as relative to creation, and with this – like knocking down the first domino in a long chain – he is then able to affirm all of the other antinomies that follow, but principally, God and the world, and the two distinguished Sophias: creaturely Sophia or (Sophia in potential) and the Divine Sophia (Sophia as entelchy). Bulgakov is quite clear that this is inspired by his commitment to the truth of Chalcedonian Christology, which confirms the unity and distinction of divinity within humanity in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>964</sup> Bulgakov essentially develops Chalcedonian Christology into a general metaphysical ontology that encompasses God and the world, which for him is necessary insofar as a 'foundation' is needed to conceive the possibility of such a union in Christ, which he makes clear in later writings.<sup>965</sup> These are the modifications by which Bulgakov is supposed to adapt and filter his Sophiology from its earlier, more 'dubious' sources. Given the significance of this process for Bulgakov's theology, it is necessary to explore this feature.

At first glance, the antinomical method in Bulgakov's writings appears to be a rejection of his earlier dependency on idealist dialectic, in favour of something broadly resembling Kantianism. Thus, theological truths have a tendency to produce, what Bulgakov perceives as antinomies for theoretical reason (God is both one and three, Jesus is both divine and human, and so forth) there is no attempt to overcome them or avoid them (as in Hegel, or even Kant to some extent), but to embrace them. And as we noted earlier, these 'tensions' cease to be problematic within the worshiping life of the Church, they are 'resolved' within Church practice, just as Kant attempts to address his antinomies through the practical reason. In this reading, Bulgakov appears to be advocating an apohatic theology that embraces mystery, albeit via Kant. However, rather unexpectedly, given his earlier perceptive critiques of Kantian philosophy, Bulgakov appears to fall victim to the inherent tensions existing between ontology and epistemology within Kant's philosophy which were outlined by Jacobi. Following Kant, Bulgakov appears to prioritize

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<sup>964</sup> For instance: 'The dogma of divine-humanity is precisely the main theme of Sophiology, which in fact represents nothing but its full dogmatic elucidation' (Sergius Bulgakov, *Sophia, the Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*, Steiner Books, 1993, p.17).

<sup>965</sup> 'This appears also as the ontological ground of the possibility of the Incarnation, of the *re-union* of both natures in the one hypostasis of the Logos, the divine and the human, of the world uncreated and created, bearing witness to their primordial unity in Sophia' (Brandon Gallaher and Irina Kukota, 'Protopresbyter Sergii Bulgakov: Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to the Unfading Light,' in: *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 49:1-2 (2005), pp.5-46, p.17, see also: p.32).

epistemology over ontology insofar as ‘to be’ is necessarily equated with ‘to be known,’ it therefore syllogistically follows that if being is not known then there is simply no being. This problematic first arises in Bulgakov’s antinomy between God as Absolute and God as Absolute relative. Following this logic, strictly speaking there can be no transcendent Absolute as distinct or more than the God who reveals himself to the world, principally because such an Absolute could not *be known* and thus it could not *be* in any sense of the word, it would [not] ‘be’ a mere emptiness, an absence, *nothing*.<sup>966</sup> However, this is not the divine nothing of a Pseudo-Dionysius, the God who is both beyond being and non-being, but the nothing rendered as such by Kantian epistemology. Thus, in order for God *to be*, God must be known, in order for God to be known, there must be a comprehending other, this must therefore imply that God is only God insofar as he is bound to this knowing other. However, since there could not be a point when God was not God, otherwise he would not be God or the Absolute at all, but another becoming being bound to the possibility of its own non-being, this comprehending other must therefore be ontologically as necessary to God as he is to himself. Hence, this comprehending other is either God relating to himself or God relating to the world; but both seem to amount to the same option given that, if creation were to perform this role it would be equi-eternal with God himself and ontologically indistinguishable from the same and therefore not a ‘creation’ in any sense of that word. Bulgakov implies this on numerous occasions: ‘In order that God *may be*, the world *must exist*, and it likewise becomes the *condition* for the being of God.’<sup>967</sup> Similarly: ‘one must include the world’s creation in God’s own life, co-posit the creation with God’s life, correlate God’s world-creating act with the act of His self-determination.’<sup>968</sup> Of course, Bulgakov means ‘God’ in the sense of the relative Absolute, but this is precisely the problem, there can be no God other than a God who reveals himself (even if the antinomy implies a sense of (pseudo) transcendence) there is simply ‘no room’ for such transcendence, unless Bulgakov is to draw an ontological distinction within God himself (something akin to Eckhart or Palamas for instance), which would only invite a host of other theological critiques, and is an option that Bulgakov

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<sup>966</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations* (trans: Thomas Allan Smith), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2012, pp.107-9. See also: Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2004, p.360.

<sup>967</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations* (trans: Thomas Allan Smith), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2012, p.110 (my emphasis). Bulgakov affirms this contention even more explicitly in his later work, for instance, see: Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2008, p.120.

<sup>968</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2002, p.44.

could not appeal to, given the strictures of his epistemology. Therefore, it seems that he must logically collapse the Absolute into the Absolute relative: 'God, as the absolute relation in himself, is the Holy trinity...Negative or nonrelative Absoluteness is just as unconditional and primordial in Divinity as the absolute relation.'<sup>969</sup> And similarly:

The absolute relation in God, i.e., the Holy Trinity, does not arise in God as his secondary self-definition; it is just as primordial and absolute in God as its absoluteness. One can say that *Ur-Gottheit* and *Gott* are equally primordial and pre-eternal, that they are interpenetrating and identical.<sup>970</sup>

Furthermore: 'God is a relative concept that already includes a relation to the world.'<sup>971</sup> And: 'the creation of the world exists for God in his eternity, and in this sense it is equi-eternal with God.'<sup>972</sup> Moreover: 'God's going outside himself into extra-divinity is precisely the creation as God's pre-eternal creative act.'<sup>973</sup>

Thus, in another bizarre and ironic twist, Bulgakov appears to embody, within his own theological methodology, the move from Kant, who he had used precisely to move away from idealist dialectic, directly back to the 'absolute idealists' (Schelling and Hegel) which he thought he had left behind. For since there can be no authentic transcendence within the antinomical method, the antinomies are transformed into dialectical contradictions. So now, if we return to the three central antinomies that Bulgakov outlined above, we will need to read them differently. Firstly, God as Absolute and God as Absolute relative must be reformulated to simply 'God as relative,' for there can be no beyond this relative God. Secondly, God and the world turn out to be indistinguishable, insofar as both are ontologically bound together,<sup>974</sup> which finally implies that the creaturely Sophia and the Divine Sophia are simply one and the same Sophia. Therefore, there are no real antinomies to be engaged with here, for in true idealist style, Bulgakov merely demonstrates that what appears to be dialectically opposed is in fact one and the same thing. We are therefore left with an Absolute becoming itself in an other that in the end is revealed to be no

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<sup>969</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *Icons and the Name of God* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2012, p.29.

<sup>970</sup> Ibid, p.30.

<sup>971</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2008, p.121.

<sup>972</sup> Ibid, p.123.

<sup>973</sup> Ibid, p.122. See also: Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb* (trans:Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2002, p.31.

<sup>974</sup> For instance: 'since there is nothing, and can be nothing, that could have a relation to God and be not-God, this relative being of the world, too, is a divine being' (Sergius Bulgakov, *Icons and the Name of God* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2012, p.30).

other at all. And, just as all of Bulgakov's antinomies are bound to the initial 'antinomy' between God as Absolute and God as Absolute-relative, its revelation to be one and the same thing threatens to reveal the same fate for all of the other antinomies: thus, leading to pantheism, monophysitism, a collapse between the Economic and Immanent Trinity, even Bulgakov's kenotic thought would become less convincing insofar as sacrifice and kenosis, would be a veiled form of self-relating. In essence, the suggested antinomies in Bulgakov's thought, are, borrowing the phrase from William Desmond, 'counterfeit doubles.' Gallaher concludes this point excellently when stating: 'the central difficulty in Bulgakov's system is not that it is antinomic...but that he is not antinomic enough insofar as his cosmological and Sophiological antinomies are false antinomies as the same...is simply stated twice but in a different form.'<sup>975</sup>

Is there a way out of this total monistic immanence, can one rescue transcendence for the antinomical method? Perhaps, if one were to abandon its idealist heritage. However, in doing so one would only seem to generate further problems. An antinomy is, for all intents and purposes, indistinguishable from a logical contradiction, the only significant difference which distinguishes it from nonsense or a simple mistake, is that the Church endorses them. At worse, the antinomical method is then a form of ecclesiastical totalitarianism that simply cannot be questioned but only accepted on the basis of the authority that has legitimized its use. Or, alternatively, if antinomism is legitimate and truthful, and it is simply a more prior form of reasoning revealed to humanity, then how could one legitimately make use of accepted methods of identifying truth; if the principle of non-contradiction could be wrong at its very foundation or even just in certain cases (which the Church endorses) how could it be used effectively at any other point, a factor that does not appear to effect Bulgakov. However, perhaps the biggest flaw of the antinomical method is simply that it is unnecessary to theology, insofar as it remains too close to oppositional and dialectical thinking. For orthodox Christian theology, God and the world (transcendence and immanence) are not ontological conundrums or problematic relationships. Put simply, God's transcendence is not purchased at the expense of his immanence; it is precisely because God is transcendent that one can equally affirm a unique form of immanence. And so it follows that in affirming God one does not detract from the world, in

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<sup>975</sup> Brandon Gallaher, *There is Freedom: The Dialectic of Freedom and Necessity in the Trinitarian Theologies of Sergii Bulgakov, Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Ph.D Thesis; Regent's Park College; Oxford, publication forthcoming: Oxford University Press), 2010, p.107.

upholding God's omnipotence one does not negate human freedom, and so forth. The antinomical method already presupposes ontological (because this is not distinguished from epistemology) incompatibility between God and the world; the 'clashing of opposites'; but God can only collide with the world if he is too much like the world in the first place- another 'thing.' Once God's transcendence is truly upheld then such tensions immediately dissolve, as does the sense of the antinomical method, which of course has already been confirmed in the Christian proclamation that Christ is both God and human.<sup>976</sup>

It is important to note that I remain completely convinced that Bulgakov intended none of these positions,<sup>977</sup> however, I also remain completely convinced that his theological methodology and his Sophiology must logically lead to these conclusions.

Therefore, although Bulgakov appeared to have moved beyond his early Sophiological speculations, the implications of his theological method inevitably draw him back to it. Thus, if the Sophia in potential is identical to the realized Sophia as entelechy (which seemingly must be the case) why do they appear to be so divergent? The 'problem of finitude' resurfaces again, which Bulgakov will again recourse to a metaphysical fall to address in his 1927 *Burning Bush*.

### **The Return of the Valentinian Narrative in Bulgakov's First 'Trilogy' (1927-29)<sup>978</sup>**

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<sup>976</sup> William Desmond has attempted to rescue dialectic from holistic immanence by outlining a 'metaxological' philosophy that highlights that immanence always exceeds its own state and points beyond itself, and thus locating us in the 'between' (see especially his excellent trilogy: William Desmond, *Being and the Between*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1995; William Desmond, *Ethics and the Between*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2001; William Desmond, *God and the Between*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2008; William Desmond, *Hegel's God: A Counterfeit Double*, Surrey, Ashgate, 2003). One is reminded of Erich Przywara's statement that: 'the genuine Catholic form of evidential statement is essentially one of reference to the incomprehensible, yet of a reference which does not leap the bounds of the comprehensible, but flows on calmly to the end, until it merges, like the estuary of a river, into a sea of mystery' (Erich Przywara, *Polarity* (trans: A.C. Bouquet), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1935, p.47).

<sup>977</sup> For instance, Bulgakov rejects that possibility that Christ could have become incarnate within the angelic nature because of its inherent proximity to the divine nature; he clearly believes that there is a strict ontological and essential difference between creator and creation but this contention does not appear to follow from the logic of his theology (see: Sergius Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, p.148).

<sup>978</sup> The so called 'smaller trilogy' is comprised of books on Mariology, John the Baptist, and the angels. Bulgakov conceived it as a theological explication of the Deisis icon, and it demonstrates the authoritative significance of iconography and Liturgy for Bulgakov's theology. Drawing theological conclusions from icons may seem like a strange concept for a Western Christian (a major factor in Bulgakov's insistence that John the Baptist participates in the angelic nature is that he appears with wings in the Deisis (Sergius Bulgakov, *The Friend of the Bridegroom* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2003, p.131)), however this is not so amongst Orthodox Christians, where the icon is perceived as a genuine revelation. According to Florensky, the 'ideal world' correlates with the 'real' world constantly. The iconographer, through asceticism and prayer, can become so attuned to the

Bulgakov gives his most detailed account of the fall in his 1927 Mariological work *The Burning Bush*. Here, he embarks on an original and excellent account of ‘*bogochelovechestvo*’ (Godmotherhood) which Bulgakov conceives as being inseparable from Christology. He offers a pervasive and polemical attack on the Roman Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception, as well as outlining a perceptive theology of grace, providence, and history.<sup>979</sup> For the purposes of this investigation, we shall focus on Bulgakov’s account of the fall, which his theology seemingly requires given the disparity of the duplicated Sophias from their original and intended unity.

According to Bulgakov ‘the primordial human being was created pure and unblemished. Therefore he was a personal bearer of Divine Wisdom, of Creaturely Sophia.’<sup>980</sup> Thus, similarly to Henri de Lubac in the West, Bulgakov rejects any sharp distinction between the ‘natural’ and the ‘supernatural’ (for Bulgakov, these seem practically indistinguishable).<sup>981</sup> In fact, such a distinction is the result of the fall: ‘that distinction in the human as a creaturely being that was disclosed only after the fall, namely, between that which belongs to the human as a creature, and that which is given to him only in virtue of an extraordinary gift of grace but which itself does not belong to him.’<sup>982</sup> The significance of this position is that ‘creatureliness’, in its current state, is not a norm of its being. Therefore, the duplicity of Sophia is a product of the fall that ought not to be. This observation is somewhat confirmed by Bulgakov’s insistence that the fall is a pre-temporal event that takes place within ideal humanity itself or the creaturely Sophia (something akin to the Kabbalistic *Adam-Kadmon*): ‘in him [pan-humanity/Adam] this entire race existed:

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ideal world that glimpses of it can be gained and represented in iconographic format: ‘when we pass from ordinary reality into the “imaginal” space, naturalism generates imaginary portrayals whose similarity to everyday life creates an empty image of the real. The opposite art – symbolism – born of the descent, incarnates in real images the experience of the highest realm; hence, this imagery – which is symbolic imagery – attains a super-reality’ (Pavel Florensky, *Iconostasis*, New York, St. Vladimir’s Press, 1996, p.45).

<sup>979</sup> This is a good introduction to Bulgakov’s account of synergy (the cooperation of divinity and humanity), for another excellent essay that outlines this crucial Bulgakovian concept, see: Sergius Bulgakov, *Relics and Miracles* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2011, pp.43-115.

<sup>980</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush* (trans: Thomas Allan Smith), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2009, p.15.

<sup>981</sup> See, for instance, Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Etudes historique*, Paris, Aubier, 1946; Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (trans: Rosemary Sheed), Crossroad, 1998; Henri de Lubac, *Augustinianism in Modern Theology* (trans: L.C. Sheppard), Crossroad, 2000; Henri de Lubac, *Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, Ignatius, 1984. For a slightly more cautious approach to the relationship between nature and grace see: Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations IV* (trans: Kevin Smyth), London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966, pp.165-88; for a good analysis of Rahner’s position see: Stephen J. Duffy, ‘Experiences of Grace’, in: Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp.43-63.

<sup>982</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush* (trans: Thomas Allan Smith), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2009, p.15.

the whole of humanity was present as a single, all-encompassing nature and essence.<sup>983</sup> This ideal humanity was not an ‘individual’ hypostasis but a pan-human hypostasis whose fall resulted in ‘the falling away of humankind from God, and in it, of the whole world, the disruption of the internal norm of humanity’s being.’<sup>984</sup> However, as we have already noted, the ideal humanity is synonymous with Sophia in its creaturely guise, which is also ontologically bound to the Divine Sophia, hence any fall of ideal humanity must reflexively be a fall of God from God.<sup>985</sup> And, although Bulgakov consistently critiques Origen’s cosmology<sup>986</sup> and attempts to align himself with the tradition which espouses the theory of ‘divine ideas,’<sup>987</sup> it is difficult to comprehend how an idea could have the capacity to will and rebel before it has come into *its own* proper existence.<sup>988</sup> What has fallen away from God is quite clear when Bulgakov states: ‘Sophia is the single life, the single essence, the single content of the life of the whole most Holy Trinity; and with respect to the world and humankind...she is the divine world, its foundation or idea in God, the world in God prior to its creation.’<sup>989</sup> Therefore, if the metaphysical fall is a falling away of God from God or the duplicating of Sophia, as it appears to be, Bulgakov will

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<sup>983</sup> Ibid, p.20.

<sup>984</sup> Ibid, p.27.

<sup>985</sup> Sometimes Bulgakov equates the ideal creation with Christ: ‘Christ’s humanity contains in itself every human being (excepting sin) and every human person with its personal characteristics. It is the universal, all-human, all-personal I’ (Sergius Bulgakov, *Jacob’s Ladder* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, p.3).

<sup>986</sup> Ibid, p.30.

<sup>987</sup> See, for instance: Sergius Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush* (trans: Thomas Allan Smith), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2009, p.58, and Sergius Bulgakov, *Jacob’s Ladder* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, p.31, 42, 66, 67, 82, 87.

<sup>988</sup> Bulgakov attempts to equate his thought with Maximus the Confessor’s, see: Sergius Bulgakov, *Sophia, the Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*, Steiner Books, 1993, p.42. Balthasar appears to share this observation when he notes the close similarities between Gnosticism, Maximus’ cosmology and ‘Russian Sophia mysticism’ (see: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1988, p.192, 382). At least in Maximus’ most comprehensive outline of his critical reformulation of Origen’s cosmology (*Ambigua VII*), the divine ideas do not function as an attempt to affirm some pre-existent anthropological, quasi hypostatic principle existing in God (although, the divine ideas undoubtedly have anthropological and Christological implications), they merely follow from a creation theology that makes certain claims about the world in light of a particular understanding of God. Therefore, if God is eternal and creation does not mark a change in God, then the ‘idea’ of creation must be ‘contained’ within God as a certain exemplar for the world that will come to be for itself out of nothing. This appears to be how Aquinas utilises this principle (see: Gregory T. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, CUA Press, 2008). Although Bulgakov’s approach is not entirely unrelated to the above thinkers, it is quite clear that the anthropological ‘idea’ existing eternally in God is more than an intellectual ‘blueprint’ for creation, but a hypostatic entity that is very much in being for itself and capable of willing and rebelling against God. Perhaps, the most theologically responsible answer would echo Augustine’s in Book XI of his Confessions, where he denies the sense of the question, insofar as any answer already smuggles in some conception of ‘time’ in relation to God where there can be no such conception, given that it is created.

<sup>989</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush* (trans: Thomas Allan Smith), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2009, p.136.

need to resolve this tension with a restoration narrative that negates Sophia's duplicity.<sup>990</sup> He anticipates such a response by suggesting that the world is a historical process teleologically driven by the 'fallen Sophia' to regain her lost identity with her heavenly counterpart (Bulgakov's version of Hegel's *List der Vernunft*)<sup>991</sup>. This process generates various progressive stages in history that culminates, reaching its highest points, in the figures of Mary and John the Baptist,<sup>992</sup> the arrival of these two figures on the world stage marks the possibility of the divine descent; the Incarnation and the 're-union' of the duplicated Sophias. There is a simultaneous 'bottom to top' and 'top to bottom' movement that ends with their mutual identity. This is precisely why for Bulgakov, the 'divine Incarnation is inseparably connected with the divine motherhood, the one implies the other.'<sup>993</sup> Hence 'the Mother of God is Sophianic in the utmost degree. She is the fullness of Sophia in creation and in this sense is creaturely Sophia.'<sup>994</sup>

Bulgakov draws a similar conclusion about the significance of John the 'Forerunner': he 'came as a living representative of all human kind. In his person was accomplished the meeting of the God-man with humanity.'<sup>995</sup> Therefore, John naturally has the same significance for the Incarnation as Mary does: 'if not for John, Christ the savior could not have come into the world...the place he occupies in relation to Christ is correlative to that of the Mother of God.'<sup>996</sup>

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<sup>990</sup> It is important to note that this metaphysical fall is not something akin to the 'angelic fall.' It is clear in Bulgakov's Angelology that it is Sophia or the ideal creation that falls; the angels and humanity simply make up two modes of existence for the one Sophia: 'The Wisdom of God, the self-revelation of the Holy Trinity...contains the idea or prototype of creation, the divine world, pre-eternally existing in God...She is God himself in his self-revelation, with respect to the creaturely world she is the world before creation, *kosmos noetos*, the divine world, the prototypical containing in itself the sufficient and exhaustive foundation for all that is' (Sergius Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, p.28) and 'the angelic world and the human world are distinguished by the form of their being, but have a unity of creative foundation...Divine prototypes, the ideas of the world, are realized in creation in two ways: in heaven-spiritually, non-incarnately, and on the earth in incarnation' (Ibid, p.31).

<sup>991</sup> 'God's providence in the natural world is the Divine Sophia herself, acting in the natural world as a force of internal movement' (Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2002, p.201).

<sup>992</sup> It is this synergistic process that allows Bulgakov to sidestep the problematic that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception seeks to solve i.e., Mary's personal effort in soliciting divine grace and the grace that enables Mary to prepare the world for the Incarnation; for Bulgakov it is both without tension given that it is precisely divine grace that has worked through the Old Testament Church and 'produced' Mary yet not arbitrarily, but through the natural process of history.

<sup>993</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush* (trans: Thomas Allan Smith), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2009, p.107.

<sup>994</sup> Ibid, p.105.

<sup>995</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Friend of the Bridegroom* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2003, pp.12-13.

<sup>996</sup> Ibid, p.5.



Both figures thus represent the fallen Sophia in her highest potential, having grown into these individual representatives of the world that are ready to receive God:

In them, humanity experiences self-restoration and self-salvation in the measure that such experience is given to and therefore required of humanity. The fallen human essence [Sophia] is raised to the highest level that is accessible to it...The Old Testament is accomplished, and therefore overcome.<sup>997</sup>

Therefore, it would appear that Bulgakov re-appropriates the Gnostic narrative structure that he had seemingly abandoned post *Philosophy of Economy*. We noted that, despite the theory of antinomy, Bulgakov was unable to avoid the ‘problem of finitude,’ given the ontological identity of the divine and the creaturely, which then forced him to re-visit his metaphysical fall narrative, which narrates the cause of the duplicity of Sophia in her two respective modes of existence divine and creaturely, which Bulgakov quickly attempted to negate by advocating the re-union of the disjointed Sophias - via an historical process- which culminates in fallen Sophia’s readiness for the divine descent in the Incarnation. We shall now explore Bulgakov’s further Sophiological developments and the depiction of the ‘reunion’ of the two Sophias in the Incarnation, which he outlines in his mature trilogy.

### **Sophia in the Mature Trilogy (1933-45) and Beyond.**

In Bulgakov’s major dogmatic work on Christology, *The Lamb of God* (1933), he attempts to articulate his conception of the distinction between the Divine Sophia and the creaturely Sophia. Leo Zander, in his influential *Bog I Mir* (1948), suggested that Bulgakov moves away from his earlier ‘monistic’ Sophiology towards a more dualistic conception of Sophia.<sup>998</sup> However, we will have reason to question the authenticity of the ontological difference between the Divine and creaturely Sophias as we shall see shortly. According to Bulgakov, *personal spirit* is univocally shared by *all* intellectual beings (divine or human) and must include ‘a personal consciousness of self.’<sup>999</sup> Personal spirit must therefore be comprised of hypostasis/subject and nature/object: ‘the personal thus has in itself its own nature, in which it lives ceaselessly realizing itself for itself through this nature, defining itself and revealing itself to itself.’<sup>1000</sup> Furthermore, this

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<sup>997</sup> Ibid, p.4.

<sup>998</sup> According to Zander this occurred as early as 1928/30 in his *Gravy o Troichnosti* (Chapters on the Trinity) see: Aidan Nichols, *Light From the East: Authors and Themes in Orthodox Theology*, Stagebooks, 1995, p.72.

<sup>999</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2008, p.89.

<sup>1000</sup> Ibid.

intercommunicative dynamic is the ‘indissoluble unity of the personal self-consciousness.’<sup>1001</sup> Bulgakov further elucidates his understanding of ‘nature’ by defining it as the ‘world’ or ‘content’ of the hypostasis, which is both given, and determining in respect to the hypostasis, as well as simultaneously being shaped and defined by it.<sup>1002</sup> Although Bulgakov maintains that the hypostasis/nature dynamic is essentially the same for all intellectual beings, there is one crucial distinction to be made:

In relation to the hypostasis of God as the Absolute subject, there is the trihypostatic personality, which in one personal consciousness of self unites all the modes of the personal principle: I, thou, he, we, and you; whereas a unihypostatic personality has all these modes except I outside itself.<sup>1003</sup>

Despite the unity of the hypostatic and the natural within God constituting one divine existence, he is keen to uphold the distinction between hypostasis and nature: ‘the nature is eternally hypostasized in God as the adequate life of the hypostases, whereas the hypostases are eternally connected in their life with the nature, while remaining distinct from it.’<sup>1004</sup>

Bulgakov later utilizes this distinction of hypostasis and nature to narrate an elaborate theogonic mythology grounded in a metaphysical Trinitarian kenosis (greatly reminiscent, in ambition, of Schelling’s own theogony in his *Essay on Human Freedom* and the *Ages of the World*) where he speaks of ‘mutual sacrifice’ and ‘self-renunciation’ for the sake of the other hypostases (each performing their own self-sacrifice); a process that threatens to ‘end in tragedy’ (presumably the self-destruction of the Father and the Son in their mutual depletion) but for the Holy Spirit, the ‘joy’ that unites Father and Son.<sup>1005</sup>

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<sup>1001</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1002</sup> Ibid, p.90.

<sup>1003</sup> Ibid, p.94.

<sup>1004</sup> Ibid, p.97.

<sup>1005</sup> Ibid, pp.98-101; see also: Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2004, p.180. Rowan Williams calls its ‘potent mythology’ (Rowan Williams, *A Margin of Silence: The Holy Spirit in Russian Orthodox Theology*, Quebec, 2008, p.23). Interestingly, Hans Urs von Balthasar proposes a similar conception of metaphysical Trinitarian kenosis (albeit with some ‘erotic’ imagery): ‘[the] Power of Christ is the perfect image of the eternal Father precisely because neither Christ nor the Father holds anything back for himself or places any reservations on his own self surrender...unlike the man in the act of intercourse, Christ does not give away just a little of his substance. No, Christ gives away his entire substance, just as the eternal Father, in begetting the Son, makes over to the Son his entire divine substance, and then again both of them give this substance over to the Holy Spirit, without division, in an act of communal love’ (Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *New Elucidations*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1979, p.17). He also suggests that the Father’s ‘womb’ is left empty in the generation of the Son (Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama III: The Dramatis Personae: The Person in Christ*, (trans: Graham Harrison), San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1992, p.518).

According to Bulgakov the divine nature, although eternally related to the hypostases, exists also ‘by itself’ which is characterized as the Divine Sophia: ‘the Divine Sophia is nothing other than God’s nature, His *ousia*...*ousia* and Sophia are identical.’<sup>1006</sup> Although, as we have already noted, Bulgakov rejects the Divine Sophia being a ‘fourth hypostasis,’ he insists that there is something ‘hypostatic’ about her; her ability to be compatible with the hypostases implies that she has ‘hypostaticity,’ hence: ‘the nature must therefore be considered not only as something existent in God, as *ousia*-Sophia, but also as something independent, as Divinity or the Divine world in itself.’<sup>1007</sup> Bulgakov also uses the phrase ‘Pleroma’ to identify this Divine world.<sup>1008</sup> And, even though she is not a hypostasis, he contends that Sophia still ‘answers’ the three hypostases and responds to them with a form of love (however passive this form may be); she is a ‘living entity.’<sup>1009</sup> Bulgakov also has a tendency to describe the Divine Sophia as God’s ‘Glory’ yet the latter principally refers to the manifestation of the divine life to and for itself: ‘the revelation of God’s Beauty and All-blessedness.’<sup>1010</sup> And: ‘the Divine Glory is thus the Glory of God about his Divinity that is being revealed. This is God’s joy about himself.’<sup>1011</sup>

Having outlined, what Bulgakov considers to be unique to the Divine Sophia, he then goes on to define the relationship of the Divine Sophia to creation. According to Bulgakov, the creation of humanity in the ‘image of God’ suggests an ontological correlation between God and humanity that ‘builds a bridge of *ontological identification* between the Creator and creation.’<sup>1012</sup> This ‘bridge of ontological identification’ implies a certain inseparability between theology and anthropology: ‘this identity signifies not only the divinity of man but also a certain humanity of God.’<sup>1013</sup> As we have already noted, this *metaxu* or ‘ontological cross-over point’ between God and creation, is given positive expression in Bulgakov’s Sophiology: ‘there is something in Man that must be *directly correlated* with God’s being’, and this is none other than Sophia herself: ‘Sophia is the pre-eternal humanity, and the Logos is the Divine man. The Divine Humanity and the God-Man, that is, the humanity of Divinity and the divinity of humanity, are given pre-

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<sup>1006</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2008, p.101.

<sup>1007</sup> *Ibid*, p.103.

<sup>1008</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>1009</sup> *Ibid*, p.105.

<sup>1010</sup> *Ibid*, p.107.

<sup>1011</sup> *Ibid*, p.109.

<sup>1012</sup> *Ibid*, p.112 (my emphasis).

<sup>1013</sup> *Ibid*.

eternally in God.’<sup>1014</sup> Bulgakov’s further attempts at clarifying these points do little but intensify reservations, despite attempting to soften his suggestions by appealing to their analogical nature; he seems to immediately sublimate this disclaimer by withdrawing his appeal to analogy:

The definition of divine nature as pre-eternal Humanity or Divine-Humanity...is conceived as a reflection from the creaturely world, from creaturely humanity. In this sense this definition is only an analogy, but one that is understood *realistically*: that is, not only are all the distinctions of state preserved, but *the identity of being* is also preserved.<sup>1015</sup>

This radical ontological and dialectical identification between God and the world forces Bulgakov to reject any proper notion of a *creatio ex nihilo* (because the world is fundamental to God’s own being) and affirm a *creatio ex Deo*, which is worth quoting at length:

The All in the Divine world, in the Divine Sophia, and the All in the creaturely world, in the creaturely Sophia, *are one and identical in content* (although not in being). *One and the same Sophia is revealed in God and in creation.* Therefore, if the negative definition “God created the world out of nothing” eliminates the idea of any non-divine or extra-divine principle of creation, its positive content can only be such that *God created the world out of Himself, out of his essence.* And the idea that the content of the world was invented ad hoc by God at the creation of the world must be fundamentally rejected. The positive content of the world’s being is just as divine as its foundation in God.<sup>1016</sup>

Bulgakov attempts to fashion some ontological distinction between the divine and the creaturely by affirming their *modal* distinction:

That which exists pre-eternally in God, in His self-revelation, exists in the world only in becoming, as becoming divinity. And metaphysically the creation of the world consists in the fact that God established its proper divine world not as an eternally existent world but as a becoming world...The Divine Sophia became also the creaturely Sophia. God *repeated* Himself in creation.<sup>1017</sup>

As we have already shown, Bulgakov’s antinomical reasoning can fashion no ‘space’ for a transcendent God who exceeds his own relativity; however, he is still conscious to avoid his

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<sup>1014</sup> Ibid, p.114.

<sup>1015</sup> Ibid, p.116 (my emphasis).

<sup>1016</sup> Ibid, p.126 (my emphasis). Bulgakov conceives of ‘nothing’ dialectically, in a very similar vein to Hegel. Nothing can only be conceived in relation to a something, thus God’s positing of something from within his essence dialectically produced an opposing nothing which gives rise to being in becoming. See also: Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2002, p.44, 48.

<sup>1017</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2008, p.126; see also: Ibid, p.127. See also: Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2004, p.270).

contention lapsing into a crude pantheism,<sup>1018</sup> which he attempts to avoid by upholding a modal distinction between the Divine Sophia and the creaturely Sophia, although one is ontologically identical to the other, in their current modes of existence (actuality and potentiality) they are distinguished. Nonetheless, it seems incredibly difficult to accept that this clause is able to avoid the obvious implication of pantheism. A modal distinction is simply not radical enough. This leads Bulgakov back to the ‘problem of finitude,’ if they are, in essence, identical, why should one fail to conform to the other. Bulgakov appears to waver between two possibilities, the first is that this historical becoming of the externalized essence of God is purposeful (yet why would there need to be a historical process at all?) the second is that it is the product of a fall (as Bulgakov outlined in the *Burning Bush*), which must amount to a fall within God himself and propel Bulgakov back into the Gnostic narrative that he has attempted to avoid. He gives clear expression to this second option, stating that ‘nature turned to Him [God] not her Sophianic but her creaturely face, the face of the “fallen” or “dark” Sophia, this image of nonbeing (i.e., of materiality) in an illegitimate, abnormal, distorted state.’<sup>1019</sup> And, even more explicitly: ‘having become the fallen Sophia, the world broke away from the Divine Sophia in the mode of its being, although of course not in its foundation.’<sup>1020</sup> He even refers to this ‘fallen Sophia’ using a Valentinian vocabulary, calling her ‘Achamoth.’<sup>1021</sup> This then leads Bulgakov directly back into Valentinian mythology: ‘can the “fallen Sophia”...be received into the hypostasis of the Logos? Is she worthy of being united with the Divine nature...Has the “fallen Sophia” not lost her dignity and the possibilities associated with it?’<sup>1022</sup> Bulgakov claims that she has prepared herself through the historical process of the world which, in turn, is nothing more than the restoration of what was originally in place: ‘the presentation of the human race for the reception of the Incarnation was accomplished in the Old Testament Church by God’s providential

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<sup>1018</sup> Although, Bulgakov does later acknowledge that his system is akin to a certain ‘pious’ form of pantheism which he believes amounts to panentheism (see: Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2004, p.199).

<sup>1019</sup> Ibid, p.146.

<sup>1020</sup> Ibid, p.154. See also: Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2002, p.160, 169, 170, 171.

<sup>1021</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2008, pp.154-55. See also: Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2004, p.201.

<sup>1022</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2008, p.199.

government;<sup>1023</sup> a process which, as we have already noted, culminates in Mary the *Theotokos* and John the Forerunner.<sup>1024</sup>

Before outlining this restoration narrative, Bulgakov is keen to account for the ontological possibility of the Incarnation, which he has already achieved from the perspective of his theology, but now attempts to do so from his anthropology (which in essence are in fact the same thing in Bulgakovian thought). And, far from alleviating the force of these critiques, it appears to enforce them. He contends that ‘by his initial essence Man must already be divine-human in this sense; he must bear hypostatic divine-humanity within himself and represent, in this capacity, an ontological “site” for the hypostasis of the Logos.’<sup>1025</sup> Therefore, Bulgakov’s basic anthropology includes an uncreated divine spark or spirit that directly correlates to the divine essence, a created soul, a mind, and a fleshly body. Thus, the hypostasis of the Logos merely replaces, the would be divine spark in the human being within his Incarnation, which does no violence to his general anthropology, given that this aspect of humanity was *already* divine: ‘the human spirit in Man, which originates from God, is in Christ the Pre-eternal Logos.’<sup>1026</sup> With the descent of the Logos, the cyclical Gnostic narrative completes itself: humanity is ‘deified here to such an extreme degree that it is capable of becoming an inseparable part of the divine life of the God-man and, in Him, an inseparable part of the life of the Holy Trinity.’<sup>1027</sup> The re-union of the duplicated Sophias is complete: ‘In Christ, in His Divine-Humanity, the total Sophianization of creation, and, in this sense, the identification of the creaturely Sophia and the non-creaturely

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<sup>1023</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1024</sup> He also states: ‘in his fall, Man, loses his perfect humanity, which remains beyond the limits of history as an unactualized ideal. Human history begins and proceeds in the same “evolutionary” way as the rest of creation, with the difference, of course, that, even in the natural process, man retains the supernatural principle of his spirit’ (Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2002, p.181).

<sup>1025</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2008, p.186.

<sup>1026</sup> Ibid, p.188. In Bulgakov’s attempt to conceive of the divine human union in the Incarnation he inevitably raises the complicated issues surrounding Christ’s divine-human economy and the mutual relation between the two natures. In an attempt to affirm a qualified form of divine passibility (not that far removed from some of the suggestions of Jürgen Moltmann and Eberhard Jüngel) he draws the Idealist distinction between ‘being in its self’ and ‘being for itself’ (Ibid, p.216, 221, 224) to advance a kenotic Christology that upholds that ‘in itself’ Christ’s divine nature remained impassible and did not suffer, yet sacrificing this knowledge during his Incarnation, Christ is not aware of this fact, thus ‘for itself’ the divine nature does participate in the suffering of the human nature, which even includes the participation of the other two hypostases, blurring the distinction between the Immanent and Economic Trinity (see: Ibid, p.232, 257, 260, 313). Aidan Nichols describes his approach as a ‘quasi-Cyrrilline theology of kenosis’ (Aidan Nichols, *Wisdom from Above: A Primer in the Theology of Father Sergei Bulgakov*, Gracewing, 2005, p.97).

<sup>1027</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God* (trans: Boris Jakim), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2008, p.381.

Sophia are attained.<sup>1028</sup> The Incarnation therefore completes, and yet initiates in another sense, the process of re-union and gives birth to the Church (the community of Spirit) which remains bound to Christ, both personally and ontologically, through his Ascension and inauguration of the sacramental life of the Church, which is moving towards the complete realization of the Kingdom of Heaven 'where there will no longer be a boundary between God and the world that has fallen away from him and opposes him.'<sup>1029</sup>

### **Summative Remarks**

Therefore, from the evaluations outlined in this chapter, it would appear that we are now in a position to affirm that the conventions of Valentinian mythology are indeed at the very basis of Russian Sophiology. We have documented Solovyov's appropriation of Schellingian philosophy and his personal interest in Valentinian Gnosticism, which were both shown to play pivotal roles in the construction of his Sophiology. In accepting and responding to the Valentinian philosophical problems, Solovyov utilises the figure of Wisdom to account for the reality of finitude (through a metaphysical fall narrative), which he further described as occurring within the Absolute itself. This fall implemented the subsequent ontological duplicity of Sophia who was constructed in two modes: a heavenly Sophia and a fallen Sophia. He then appealed to the Valentinian soteriological narrative to account for the reunion of the separated Sophias and the reaffirmation of his monistic first principle.

We then sought to evaluate the extent to which Solovyov's Sophiology underpinned Bulgakov's. Initially, it was demonstrated that Bulgakov had adopted this same Sophiological outline in his early works, although later sought to situate his Wisdom discourse within a more orthodox framework. However, having explored his attempts to achieve this (most notably in his theological methodology) we concluded that his revisions were not extensive enough to avoid close archaeological association with Valentinian Gnosticism. Therefore, in conclusion Russian Sophiology does appear to be underpinned by Valentinian Gnosticism. We shall now explore the development of Sophiology in contemporary British theology.

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<sup>1028</sup> Ibid, p.396.

<sup>1029</sup> Ibid, p.420.

## **Chapter VI**

### **Wisdom in Contemporary British Theology: Gnostic and Biblical accounts of Sophia in John Milbank and Paul Fiddes' Wisdom Theologies**

This thesis has sought to investigate the proposal that Valentinian Gnosticism has played a significant, even if somewhat implicit, part in the construction of influential modern philosophies and theologies. The lens through which this claim has been studied has been focused on the theological theme of Sophiology, the suitability of which was discussed in the introduction. Adopting a Foucauldian/archaeological approach to this question, this thesis investigated the development of the concept of the figure of Wisdom within Jewish and early Christian traditions by evaluating the social, cultural, political, philosophical and theological contexts and exchanges, out of which clear 'rules of formation' for this particular concept of Wisdom, located within this particular authoritative and regulated tradition, developed. A parallel process was repeated for the concept of a Valentinian Sophia, before offering a critical comparison between the two concepts of Wisdom; the result of which, indicated overlap and similarity yet also clear and emphatic distinctions. Two related yet opposing concepts of Wisdom developed out of these investigations, one biblical and the other Gnostic. It is these two strands of Sapiential thought that we shall here argue are prevalent in contemporary British theology, namely in the Sophiology of John Milbank and Paul Fiddes, thus corroborating the thesis that Valentinian Gnosticism is one significant thought form that has assisted the production of certain types of modern philosophies and theologies. However, a simple structural comparison between what was discovered in the chapters on biblical and Gnostic Wisdom theologies with Milbank's and Fiddes' proposals would hardly be sufficient to suggest anything other than a similarity of narrative form that may well have been coincidental. Adhering to the archaeological method, it has first been necessary to document and investigate the 'rules of formation' for this *particular type* of contemporary discourse on Wisdom. What conditions (social, philosophical and theological) have led modern Wisdom theologies to reproduce these concepts from Gnostic and biblical narratives. In order to explore this, we documented and suggested how the conditions that produced the Gnostic concept of Sophia in the second century, came to be located within modern philosophical discourses in a modified form, notably in post-Kantian Idealism and in



Schelling's speculative philosophy, which ultimately resulted in a particular (archaeologically shifted) concept of the Gnostic Sophia narrative emerging in modern philosophy and directing the shape of this discourse. We then discussed how this philosophical register was culturally adopted within 20<sup>th</sup> century Russia. Two individuals, most notably Solovyov and Bulgakov, translated Schellingian thought into the branch of theology known as Sophiology. We observed the creative fusion of German Idealism, with direct Gnostic references; as well as biblical, mystical and other idiosyncratic components. Thus, we have now arrived at the advent of Sophiology within modern British theology. In this chapter, we shall investigate two modern proponents of Wisdom based theologies which differ and converge both with each other and with the early Wisdom discourses outlined in chapters I and II. John Milbank's Sophiology, which he outlines in its most developed form in his essay *Sophiology and Theurgy* and Paul Fiddes' Wisdom theology, composed in his *Seeing the World and Knowing God*, shall be critically analyzed and compared before offering a final comparison of these modern Wisdom theologies with those outlined in the biblical and Gnostic narratives, attempting to determine to what extent either or both are indebted to the Gnostic concept of Sophia.

### **John Milbank's Theology in Context and his Turn to Sophiology**

John Alasdair Milbank was born in London 1952. He was brought up as a Methodist and schooled at Hymer's College, Hull, before studying history at the Queen's College, Oxford, in the early 1970's. He then came under the theological mentorship of Rowan Douglas Williams (b. 1950) (Williams is the only person Milbank explicitly acknowledges to have taught him theology), whom he met at Westcott House, whilst training for ordination within the Church of England at Cambridge.<sup>1030</sup> At the point of meeting Williams, Milbank described himself as a 'flaccid Anglican' with fairly liberal, historicist, and even pantheistic views, which were radicalized by Williams' recommendation for him to read Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) and some Continental philosophy. Milbank claimed that after a long summer of reading, he emerged as an 'orthodox Christian.' After eventually deciding not to pursue ordination, Milbank instead went on to study for, and later produce his doctoral thesis on the thought of the Italian critic of rationalism and promoter of classical thought Giambattista Vico (1668 -1744) at

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<sup>1030</sup> See: John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (second edition), Oxford, Blackwell, 2006, 'Acknowledgements.'

Birmingham University.<sup>1031</sup> Subsequently, he held a teaching fellowship at Lancaster University (1983-1991) and was also a lecturer in Ethics at Cambridge University and Fellow of Peter House, Cambridge (1993-8). He then took up a Professorship at the University of Virginia, before accepting his current position as Professor in Religion, Politics, and Ethics at Nottingham University in 2004.<sup>1032</sup>

Milbank's most significant work to date is his 1990 *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. Milbank offers a concise summary of the purpose of this project in his 2006 preface to the second edition of the same work:

*Theology and Social Theory* was written in the middle of the Thatcherite era, out of the conviction that a theological vision alone could challenge the emerging hegemony of neo-liberalism...I sought to show why, for reasons quite exceeding the political, a Catholic Christian account of reality might be entertained as the most finally persuasive one. But then, for both theological and historico-philosophical reasons, I sought also to argue that only a new embracing of such an account could free us from our contemporary historical deadlock.<sup>1033</sup>

Milbank's intentions here appear to be twofold: it is a political work designed to challenge neo-liberal assumptions from a Socialist's perspective.<sup>1034</sup> And it is also a theological work, insofar as he further seeks to demonstrate that these neo-liberal assumptions are themselves grounded in,

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<sup>1031</sup> This has now been published in two volumes: John Milbank, *The Religious Dimension in the Thought of Giambattista Vico: The Early Metaphysics I*, Edwin Mellen Press, 1991; John Milbank, *The Religious Dimension of in the Thought of Giambattista Vico: Language, Law, and History II*, Edwin Mellen Press, 1993.

<sup>1032</sup> All of the above biographical information has been sourced from: Maurice Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England III*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.372, and Milbank's own discussions.

<sup>1033</sup> Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p.XI.

<sup>1034</sup> Milbank's political beliefs tend to veer to the left; he describes himself as a 'Christian Socialist,' (For Milbank's understanding of Socialism see: John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon*, London, Routledge, 2003, pp.162-187; John Milbank, *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology*, London, SCM, 2009, pp.63-12) yet, by his own admission, he can also harbor strong conservative tendencies, for instance, see his arguments against gay marriage, the role of sex within society, and human rights: John Milbank, 'The Impossibility of Gay Marriage and the Threat of Biopolitical Control,' *ABC Religion and Ethics* (2013), cited at: <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2013/04/23/3743531.htm>. Last cited: 18/06/2013; John Milbank, 'Fry's Unsexing of Sex,' 2010, cited at: [http://theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers/Milbank\\_FrysUnsexingOfSex.pdf](http://theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers/Milbank_FrysUnsexingOfSex.pdf). Last cited: 18/06/2013; John Milbank, 'Against Human Rights,' 2009, cited at: <http://theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/online-papers/>. Last cited: 18/06/2013. In light of these convictions, he has also described himself as a 'radical conservative.' Perhaps, the best description of Milbank's political views can be sourced from his own observations: 'I have always stood proudly amongst those who see themselves as 'conservative theologically, radical politically' (John Milbank, *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology*, London, SCM, 2009, p.XI). More recently, the term 'blue labour' (popularized by Maurice Glasman (b.1961)) has been adopted by Milbank (see: John Milbank, 'Blue Labour; One Nation Labour and Postliberalism: A Christian Socialist Reading, 2012, cited at: [http://theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers/Milbank\\_BlueLabourOneNationLabourAndPostliberalism.pdf](http://theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers/Milbank_BlueLabourOneNationLabourAndPostliberalism.pdf). Last cited: 18/06/2013.

and the product of a particular theological misconception, that has its origins in ‘Franciscan Scholasticism.’ And, in exposing these connections, Milbank seeks to offer an alternative theological vision (characterized by a finite world, in all of its components, ontologically participating in God) to the one inherited by modernity, which is heavily grounded in his reading of Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Furthermore, in outlining this specific theological genealogy, Milbank identifies the presence of a secular counter-narrative to the truly theological one that he proposes, which he contends is in fact nihilistic (to the extent that it is not informed by theology).

In 1997, Milbank published, what many describe as being the sequel to *Theology and Social Theory*, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, and Culture*. Here, Milbank further reiterates the central arguments outlined in *Theology and Social Theory*, whilst also attempting to ground these ideas within a further developed Christological and Ecclesiological idiom.<sup>1035</sup>

These two major works were the primary inspiration behind the birth of the Anglo-Catholic, Anglo-American, *Cambridge* ‘theological movement’ known as *Radical Orthodoxy*. Milbank was its co-founder along with Graham Ward (b.1955) and Catherine Pickstock (b.1952), all of whom acted as co-editors of the first major theological contribution of Radical Orthodoxy: *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (1999), which is a collection of articles written by various authors sympathetic to the aims of the movement. The introduction to this work, co-written by Milbank, Ward, and Pickstock, further confirms the ambition of Milbank’s earlier works: ‘the present collection of essays attempts to reclaim the world by situating its concerns and activities within a theological framework.’<sup>1036</sup> Milbank’s own contribution to this series included his essay entitled *Knowledge: The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi*, where he attempts to utilize the relatively neglected German figures of J.G. Hamann (1730-1788) and F.H. Jacobi (1743-1819), who had, in their own ways, criticized Enlightenment rationality within a broadly theological idiom, in support of his own purposes.

The publication of *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* marked the initiation of the Radical Orthodoxy book series (supported by Routledge), which has published, to date, over thirteen

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<sup>1035</sup> Milbank has been accused of neglecting the historicity of Christ and establishing a fully-fledged ecclesiological foundation for his Christian critique of modernity (see: John Milbank, ‘Alternative Protestantism,’ in: James K.A. Smith (ed), *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology*, Michigan, Baker, 2005, pp.25-43).

<sup>1036</sup> John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock, ‘Introduction,’ in: John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock (eds), *Radical orthodoxy: A New Theology*, London, Routledge, 2002, p.1.

books from various authors sympathetic to the concerns of Radical Orthodoxy.<sup>1037</sup> Among these publications are two more of Milbank's significant contributions: the first, co-authored with Pickstock, is entitled *Truth in Aquinas* (2001) where Milbank attempts to offer an alternate reading of Aquinas<sup>1038</sup> as a Platonic/Neoplatonic metaphysician committed to an ontology of participation; or, perhaps simply to claim Aquinas as Radical Orthodoxy's own.<sup>1039</sup> Either way, Milbank further elucidates his theological response to the problem of modernity by affirming his understanding of a 'metaphysics of participation', informed by his reading of Aquinas' use of 'analogy.' These arguments are further elucidated and substantiated in his 2003 *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon*, where he emphasizes the significance of the theme of 'gift' alongside his commitment to 'ontological participation.' He is keen to explore the relationship between God and creation and the divine and human interaction (in its various modes: the incarnation, ethics, politics, etc.). It is in the preface to this edition that Milbank first highlights his admiration for Sergius Bulgakov and his Sophiology, where he intimates its future significance for his own theology.<sup>1040</sup>

In 2005 Milbank published a short work on the theology of Henri de Lubac (1896-1991), specifically his controversial understanding of the relationship between the *Supernatural* and the *Natural*.<sup>1041</sup> Milbank attempts to 'enlist' de Lubac to the Radical Orthodoxy cause in a similar

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<sup>1037</sup> Radical Orthodoxy also now have their own journal: *Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics*.

<sup>1038</sup> See also: John Milbank, 'On Thomistic Kabbalah', in: *Modern Theology*: 27:1 (2011), 147-185.

<sup>1039</sup> Milbank's reading of Aquinas is far from conventional, it diverges significantly from the typical readings offered by British theologians such as Herbert McCabe (1926-2001), Nicholas Lash (b.1934), and Denys Turner (b.1942) for instance. These theologians tend to emphasize the 'non-participatory' ramifications of Aquinas' use of analogy, preferring to read it as a manner of logically speaking about God when committed to an apophatic theology working from the premises of what we have come to understand about creatures and God as their cause/creator (see: Herbert McCabe, *St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae: III: Naming and Knowing God*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp.104-107; Nicholas Lash, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus*, Eugene, Wipf & Stock, 1986, pp.95-119; Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason, and the Existence of God*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp.193-225). Furthermore, Karen Kilby has offered a similar reading of Aquinas in: Karen Kilby, 'Aquinas, the Trinity, and the Limits of Understanding,' in: *International Journal of Systematic Theology*: VII;IV (2005), pp.414-427. Although, it is notable that respected Aquinas scholars such as David Burrell and Fergus Kerr have supported Milbank's reading. However, Paul DeHart has recently criticized Milbank's reading of Aquinas and affirmed the accuracy of the former scholars (see: Paul DeHart, *Aquinas and Radical Orthodoxy: A Critical Inquiry*, London, Routledge, 2012).

<sup>1040</sup> See: John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon*, London, Routledge, 2003, p.XII.

<sup>1041</sup> On this dense topic see: Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Etudes historique*, Paris, Aubier, 1946; Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (trans: Rosemary Sheed), Crossroad, 1998; Henri de Lubac, *Augustinianism in Modern Theology* (trans: L.C. Sheppard), Crossroad, 2000; Henri de Lubac, *Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, Ignatius, 1984. For a slightly more cautious approach to the relationship between nature and grace see: Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations IV* (trans: Kevin Smyth), London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966, pp.165-88; for a good analysis of Rahner's position see: Karen Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy* London, Routledge,

manner to the way in which he utilized Aquinas. Milbank wants to affirm that de Lubac's understanding of the *Supernatural* saturates every aspect of the created order with divine presence and truly challenges the premises of the secular narrative of an independent secular order. He also claims that de Lubac's positions marked a watershed in Western theology, that undermined, Milbank's understanding, of the strict Barthian distinction between God and the world, nature and grace, and the many other dialectical dichotomises that grew out of these initial ones, and confirmed the sensibilities of secularity. He writes:

No pure Barthianism has survived this encounter, even amongst insightful Protestants. For it became clear in the wake of this book [*Surnaturel*] that Barth's theology, for all its apparent innovation, remained confined within a Baroque contrast of nature with grace, and of reason with revelation, and had failed to reckon either with the *analogia entis* or the *surnaturel* as governing both philosophy and theology according to a logic rooted in a non-idolatrous understanding of the Creator-created divide.<sup>1042</sup>

He also criticises renowned twentieth century Catholic theologians Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) and Karl Rahner (1904-1984) on the grounds that they diverge too greatly from de Lubac.<sup>1043</sup>

In 2009, Milbank continues to interpret and re-appropriate theological figures when he turns his attention to the Russian theologian Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944). Milbank produced his essay entitled *Sophiology and Theurgy: A New Theological Horizon* published in Adrian Pabst and Paul Schneider's *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy*, to be discussed shortly. Here Milbank describes Bulgakov as one of the 'Russian masters' and lauds his theology as being the most 'significant theology of the two preceding centuries.'<sup>1044</sup> Milbank attempts to integrate Bulgakov's creative use of the biblical figure of Wisdom within his own ontology, as a means of grounding his themes of gift and participation. However, he also begins to explicitly acknowledge the paradoxical nature of his understanding of participation and seeks to accept and express this antinomy through the mediation of the figure of Wisdom, after the pattern of Bulgakov. As well as adopting Sophia for this task, he also becomes increasingly

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2004, pp.53-60; Stephen J. Duffy, 'Experiences of Grace', in: Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp.43-63.

<sup>1042</sup> John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2005, p.65.

<sup>1043</sup> Ibid, p.67.

<sup>1044</sup> John Milbank, 'Sophiology and Theurgy: the New Theological Horizon', in Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (eds), *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word*, Surrey, Ashgate, 2009, pp.45-86, p.45.

attracted to the Catholic Hegel scholar and philosopher William Desmond; specifically, his ‘post-Hegelian’ method of philosophizing typified by his ‘metaxological way.’<sup>1045</sup> Moreover, he begins to adopt many of the foundational positions of Neoplatonic figures such as Iamblichus (c.250-330) and Proclus (c.412-485), as well as Pseudo-Dionysius (c. late fifth century), Meister Eckhart (1260-1327) and Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) whom he believes to have accepted the paradoxical nature of ontological participation. It has proven to be a highly influential work that has catapulted ‘Russian Sophiology’ into Western thought, engendering a variety of different reactions as already discussed within the introduction.

In the same year Milbank writes a collaborative work with Slavoj Žižek entitled *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?*; where he further develops this conception of paradox as an alternative to the ‘Hegelian system.’ At this time he also published a collection of previously published essays on a variety of themes ranging from British theology and politics to interfaith dialogue, which he entitled: *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Philosophy*.

In 2010, Milbank again collaborated with Žižek and also Creston Davies, producing a book on St. Paul: *Paul’s New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Philosophy*. Milbank contributes two essays in this volume, one on ‘biopolitics’ and the other again, on the theme of mediation, this time in conversation with the suggestions of the French philosopher Alain Badiou (b.1937).

Milbank further elucidates the theme of mediation within participation in his 2011 *Stanton Lectures*; especially lectures IV and V.<sup>1046</sup>

Most recently Milbank has published his *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People* (2014). This book revisits and expands the central arguments of *Theology and Social Theory*.

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<sup>1045</sup> William Desmond has attempted to re-interpret dialectic in the hope of avoiding a form of holistic immanence that it can typically invite, by outlining a ‘metaxological’ philosophy that highlights that immanence always exceeds its own state and points beyond itself, and thus locating us in the ‘between’ (see especially his excellent trilogy: William Desmond, *Being and the Between*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1995; William Desmond, *Ethics and the Between*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2001; William Desmond, *God and the Between*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2008; William Desmond, *Hegel’s God: A Counterfeit Double*, Surrey, Ashgate, 2003). One is reminded of Erich Przywara’s statement that: ‘the genuine Catholic form of evidential statement is essentially one of reference to the incomprehensible, yet of a reference which does not leap the bounds of the comprehensible, but flows on calmly to the end, until it merges, like the estuary of a river, into a sea of mystery’ (Erich Przywara, *Polarity* (trans: A.C. Bouquet), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1935, p.47).

<sup>1046</sup> See: <http://theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/2011/03/12/john-milbanks-stanton-lectures-2011/>.

In addition to these works listed as his most significant, Milbank has published a variety of articles and papers, and even poetry.<sup>1047</sup> His future endeavours appear to include a longer term project developing a ‘fully-fledged Trinitarian ontology.’

The sheer breadth of Milbank’s interests and influences make it very difficult to locate his theology in any given context. Yet we can note some of the most major influences on his work, which seem to be most easily acknowledged within three criteria: political, philosophical, and theological (although these undoubtedly intersect at every point for Milbank). Firstly, one must acknowledge those thinkers who have historically challenged secular definitions of reason and rationality, and specifically Vico, Hamann, and Jacobi, all of whom have had a significant influence on Milbank’s thought.<sup>1048</sup> One could also note Alasdair MacIntyre’s (b.1929) influence in this respect also, especially his critique of post-Enlightenment ethics in favor of Aristotelian virtue ethics;<sup>1049</sup> and, perhaps, Stanley Hauerwas (b.1940), and his emphasis on ‘post-liberal’ theology.

Milbank has also been markedly influenced by the French postmodern thinkers, specifically Michel Foucault (1926-1984), Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995), and René Girard (b.1923), as well as Jaques Derrida (1930-2004) and Alain Badiou. Milbank appears to be the first British theologian to engage on a significant level with French philosophical thought, which truly marked a paradigm shift in the pattern of British theology. Milbank recounts a tongue in cheek anecdote that illustrates this point:

It was once said to me, by the late Texan theologian John Clayton, in Lancaster, that he had finally worked out what was “weird” about me: “Most of us, John, are trying to combine German theology with Anglo-Saxon philosophy. A few trendy people go for Continental philosophy as well. But you’re doing the opposite – with utter perversity you’re trying to combine *British* theology (of all things!) with Continental philosophy – and what is worse, with *French* stuff.”<sup>1050</sup>

The ‘typical’ postmodern evaluation of modernity (in the wake of Hegel) seems to have suited the intentions of Milbank’s theology as he notes himself:

The end of modernity...means the end of a single system of truth based on universal reason...theology...no longer has to measure up to accepted secular standards of scientific truth

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<sup>1047</sup> See: John Milbank, *The Legend of Death: Two Poetic Sequences*, Eugene, Cascade, 2008.

<sup>1048</sup> For one outline of the central ideas of these thinkers see: Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, and Herder*, Pimlico, 2000.

<sup>1049</sup> See: Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

<sup>1050</sup> John Milbank, *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology*, London, SCM, 2009, p.IX.

or normative rationality...In postmodernity there are infinitely many possible versions of truth, inseparable from particular narratives...[each with their own] unfounded reasons.<sup>1051</sup>

One should also mention the British philosopher Gillian Rose (1947-1995), and the influence she had on Milbank's engagement with Hegel and social theory generally.

Theologically, as we have already noted, Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas, Eckhart, and Nicholas of Cusa play a significant role in Milbank's theology. And this tendency to revisit patristic and scholastic thinkers would appear to have been inspired by the twentieth century Catholic movement known as the *Nouvelle Théologie*,<sup>1052</sup> especially Henri de Lubac. Milbank has also been distinctively influenced by Sergius Bulgakov. The common thread that appears to attract Milbank to these theological figures is their respective conceptions of the relationship between God and creation, which always presupposes some form of participation metaphysics (broadly informed by Neoplatonism). In light of these commitments, Milbank has tended to theologially shun many of the stances of, what one might describe as a particular German Protestant theology and philosophy (particularly Barth and Kant), that would seem to emphasize a certain type of ontological disparity between God and the world. However, this approach has also extended to his rejection of a particular Orthodox theology characterized by the positions of Gregory Palamas.

From within his own tradition there are obvious influences to note, John Henry Newman (1801-1890), Donald MacKinnon (1913-1994), and Rowan Williams, all of whom have seemed to have imparted a certain disposition, or way of approaching theology, that Milbank has adopted.

Milbank has proven to be extremely influential in contemporary Anglo-speaking theology, as early as 2001 he was described as being 'the most important British theologian in the world in the last ten years.'<sup>1053</sup> He has inspired a plethora of books and articles that have sought to apply his thought and major contentions.

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<sup>1051</sup> Ibid, 337.

<sup>1052</sup> On this topic see: Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie: New Theology, Inheritor of Modernity, Precursor of Vatican II*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 2010.

<sup>1053</sup> Gareth Jones, 'Review: *The Word Made Strange*', in: *Journal of Theological Studies*, April 2001, pp. 467–470.



As we have already acknowledged, Milbank's Sophiology must be seen as an extension of, and means of grounding his most sustained theological aim, which is to promote creation's ontological participation in the Being of God.<sup>1054</sup>

The significance of this theme has been well acknowledged by Milbank and his commentators alike.<sup>1055</sup>

Participation metaphysics' rise to prominence, when contextualized within the Radical Orthodoxy 'narrative,' is easily documented: the emergence of an autonomous 'secular reason' has resulted in Christianity and its theology being confined to a dubious space within the 'secular metanarrative,' whereby its claims to truth are then rigorously policed by a supposedly 'objective' and 'universal' reason debunked of all transient prejudices. Secularity governs the 'objective' public spheres (e.g. politics, academia, and reason itself) while religion, and all other 'questionable practices,' are to be strictly contained within the *private* and *subjective* realms, which are only tolerated because of the secular commitment to individual liberty. According to Milbank, generally speaking, all *Liberalism* can be characterized by these rudimentary tendencies and assumptions.

Why does theology find itself in this context? Its genesis, as conceived by Radical Orthodoxy, is apparently the result of the theological failures of the Church herself; most notably in post-Aquinas Scholasticism. It is not necessary to rehearse the entire Radical Orthodox reading of Christian theological history,<sup>1056</sup> for we can simply note that there are some reoccurring 'villains' within the narrative itself. For instance, it supposedly all begins with the Franciscan Scholastics, John Duns Scotus (1266-1308) and William of Ockham (c.1280-1339), when they depart from Aquinas in adhering to a natural theology which predicates *Being* of Creator and creature

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<sup>1054</sup> John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock, 'Introduction,' in: John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock (eds), *Radical orthodoxy: A New Theology*, London, Routledge, p.3. See also: John Milbank, 'Beauty and the Soul,' in: John Milbank, Graham Ward and Edith Wyschogrod (eds), *Theological Perspectives on God and Beauty*, London, TPI, 2003, p.7.

<sup>1055</sup> See, for instance: Steven Shakespeare, *Radical Orthodoxy: A Critical Introduction*, London, SPCK, 2007, p.104; James K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology*, Michigan, Baker, 2004, pp.185-231; Adrian Pabst, *Radical Orthodoxy: Pour Une Révolution Théologique*, Ad Solem, 2004; Ralph Norman describes the theme of participation in Radical Orthodoxy as the 'theological "glue" that holds it all together' (Ralph Norman, 'Review of Graham Ward's Christ and Culture', in: *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9:2, 2007, pp.242-245, p.244); John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon*, London, Routledge, 2003, pp.ix-xiii.

<sup>1056</sup> For a comprehensive example of their approach to the history of Christian theology see: Connor Cunningham, *The Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of Nothing and the Difference of Theology*, London, Routledge, 2002; see also: Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1998, pp.121-167.

*univocally*, so that it can be considered epistemologically acceptable.<sup>1057</sup> This decision apparently projects God and the world ‘onto the same stage’ of univocal being, where their difference must then be *dialectically* accounted for, which subsequently produces mutually exclusive spheres local to each, which reaches one of its culminations in Kantian philosophy according to Milbank. Hence, from the initial opposition of God and the World, we encounter the dialectical distinctions of the natural and the supernatural, reason and revelation, works and faith, philosophy and theology and, eventually, the *secular* and the *sacred*. According to Milbank, modern theology is characterized by its acceptance of these distinctions and its willingness to work from within the boundaries marked out for it (Milbank would cite liberal Protestantism and Karl Barth’s Neo-orthodoxy as typical examples).<sup>1058</sup> Milbank’s theological project (Radical Orthodoxy) is nothing more than an ambitious attempt to reverse this process and question the secular foundations of reason itself.

After his ‘diagnosis’ of modernity, we are led back to Milbank’s theological prescription: *participation*. If *being* is predicated *analogically* of Creator and creature, then God’s difference and transcendence are no longer in competition with creation, and God is (according to Augustine of Hippo) the One who is, and must be, simultaneously ‘*superior summo meo*’ and ‘*interior intimo meo*.’ And, since God is the only One who can *be* in this way, all other instances of being (which have, therefore, been revealed to be unessential) become radically dependent, ontologically, on God, to the extent that, as Augustine further claims: ‘unless you were *within* me, I would have no being at all.’<sup>1059</sup> Such an affirmation is also indicative of the fragile nature of finite being, thus revealing created existence to be the supreme instance of divine grace. Therefore, *all things* participate – through the *gift* of finite being - in the divine *esse*; *all things* that *exist* (only excluding those things which are sinful and, therefore, privative and non-existent) are inherently related to God *through* their very existence. Milbank is then able to demonstrate (from the metaphysics of participated being) that there can be no finite space (political,

<sup>1057</sup> See: John Duns Scotus, ‘*Cognitio Naturalis de Deo I, II*’, in: Allan Wolter (ed), *John Duns Scotus: Philosophical Writings*, Indiana, Hackett, 1987, pp.20-24; William of Ockham, ‘*Quodlibetal V: I*’, in: Philotheus Boehner (ed), *William of Ockham: Philosophical Writings*, Indiana, Hackett, 1990, pp.97-102.

<sup>1058</sup> For a classic example of this taking place, see: Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings* (trans: Schubert Ogden), Minneapolis, Fortress, 1984, pp.1-45. And in the case of Neo-orthodoxy, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer appears to have recognised, Barth rejects the liberal project to the extent that he refuses the task of ‘abridging the Gospel;’ however, he also affirms and retreats more deeply into, by his conservatism (‘positivism of revelation’), these isolated spheres that have been allotted to theology by liberalism itself (see: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, London, SCM, 1953, p.89).

<sup>1059</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions, Book I:II* (trans: Henry Chadwick), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p.4.

philosophical, or otherwise) that is not already saturated with divine presence; the traditional dichotomies, which were outlined above, can no longer be supported; put simply, there is no longer any space left for the purely secular.<sup>1060</sup>

One would be forced to concede that such a *Révolution Théologique*, as Adrian Pabst has called it, would have either been ignored or scorned, were it not for the cultural fertility provided by the contemporary postmodern climate, as Milbank is well aware and keen to exploit;<sup>1061</sup> whereby, theology is supposedly left in a state of ‘sceptical relativism’<sup>1062</sup> in which all narratives have been confined to the same epistemological plane of ungrounded faith, implying that their only claims to truth can be substantiated by how persuasive the respective narratives ultimately turn out to be. Milbank claims that the task of Radical Orthodoxy has, in reality then, changed little from liberal theology, only now persuasiveness does not occur through the ‘apologetic mediation of a supposedly neutral human reason’<sup>1063</sup> but, through faith in the intrinsic beauty of the ‘Christian *logos* itself.’<sup>1064</sup>

As already noted, Milbank’s typical method for expressing his themes of *participation* and *gift* have been through, his reading of, the ‘*analogia entis*,’ although he is quite clear that ‘analogy is predicated upon the metaphysics of participated being’<sup>1065</sup> and not *vice versa*.<sup>1066</sup> However, as Milbank’s thought evolves, he begins to discover various tensions in his theory of ontological participation and is seemingly forced to find new ways of addressing these issues, which he does, through one medium, by utilizing the theological positions of Russian Sophiology.

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<sup>1060</sup> Milbank’s position is not entirely novel to British theology – John Henry Newman appears to outline a similar conception of metaphysical participation in his conception of knowledge as its own end; neither is it foreign to political theology – Eric Voegelin outlines a similar ontology in order to combat political totalitarianism See: John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, New Haven, Yale, 1996, pp.25-91; Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, Washington, Regnery, 1997, p.30. Milbank, frequently praises theologies and philosophies that have questioned the typical dichotomies outlined in the text; most consistently, he appeals to Henri de Lubac’s conception of the natural and the supernatural (see: John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2005); and philosophers such as F. H. Jacobi and J.G. Hamann in their rejection of autonomous reason removed from faith (see: John Milbank, ‘Knowledge: the Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi’, in: John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (eds), *Radical orthodoxy*, London, Routledge, pp.21-38; also: John Milbank, ‘Hume Versus Kant: Faith, Reason, and Feeling,’ in: *Modern Theology* 27:2 (2011), pp.276-297).

<sup>1061</sup> John Milbank, *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology*, London, SCM, 2009, p.337.

<sup>1062</sup> John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (second edition), Oxford, Blackwell, 2006, p.1.

<sup>1063</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1064</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1065</sup> John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, London, Routledge, 2001, p.46

<sup>1066</sup> David Burrell appears to agree with Milbank on this point. See: David Burrell, *Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2004, pp.115-120.

While he acknowledges his intellectual debt to the ‘Russian masters,’ he makes it emphatically clear that he has no interest in merely restating what they have already proposed but, rather, to tease out and creatively extend their speculations ‘in my own idiom, which will not hesitate...to extend Sophiological reflection beyond the conclusions arrived at by the great Russian masters.’<sup>1067</sup> And, this is precisely what he does, giving birth to, what has quickly come to be considered as, Milbank’s own unique Sophiology. Yet the question remains ‘why Sophiology;’ what tensions and aporias within Milbank’s current ontology direct him to turn to Russian Sophiology, what solutions does Sophiology offer?

In 2003, John Milbank first wrote of the importance of the ‘Russian Sophiological tradition’ in the context in which he believed it could aid him through a particular theological/ontological dilemma concerning God’s relationship to creation. There is no mention of Sophiology in Milbank’s first two major works (*Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*: 1990 and *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture*: 1997). This appears to be due to the fact that here Milbank is principally concerned with expending his intellectual efforts on diagnosing what is wrong with modernity, how it has gone wrong, and what he can do to rectify it. Although he intimates his theological response to the problems he has identified (by insisting that there can be no finite world independent of God; in all of its modes it *is*, because it participates in the Being of God) he does not fully address all of the theological issues that will eventually grow out of this central position. This occurs a little later, when Milbank begins to comprehensively acknowledge and come to terms with the theological tension lying at the base of his ‘ontology of participation,’ it is this same tension on which the axis of Milbank’s own Sophiology will later consistently turn: if God is all (ontologically speaking) that *is* and creation is other to God, how can creation properly exist? The attempt to avoid the possible pantheistic implications of participation metaphysics, whilst ensuring that such avoidance would not further substantiate the conception of an independent finite world grounded in secularity, is a crucial theme in Milbank’s ontology and the central issue that his Sophiology will eventually attempt to address by finding a mode of *mediation* for these positions. This dynamic is so fundamental to clarifying the context in which Milbank will go on to utilize ‘Sophiology’ that it is worth quoting him at length on it:

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<sup>1067</sup> Ibid, p.50.

If, according to the Thomistic view to which I subscribe, the occasion for incarnation was our deliverance, then nevertheless for Aquinas, in accordance with Chalcedonian logic, the upshot of the Incarnation exceeds its occasion. The result of the contingency of deliverance is paradoxically the eternal inclusion of a human nature under a divine enhypostatization. Since God is impassable, although this circumstance only begins to be in time, this beginning-to-be must somehow belong eternally to God... The task here is to think through this paradox, without lapsing into idealist *gnosis* which ontologizes a necessary passage through evil. In some fashion... he is eternally humanity as well as God. This is an aspect of what some *Russian theologians* have deemed the ‘Sophiological’ mystery of God being eternally more than God, even though there is nothing more than God, and creation is not necessitated.<sup>1068</sup>

Milbank first attempted to respond to this ontological aporia in *Truth in Aquinas*. According to Milbank, the ontological tension can be somewhat resolved by affirming that the very existence of God includes an immanent expression of ‘mediated otherness’ within God’s dynamic ‘life’ as Trinitarian ‘relation;’ creation can then simply be conceived as an agapeic overflow of God’s own gratuity:

Aquinas details God’s presence to creatures, under the heading of divine substance. This drastically indicates that God’s omnipresence simply is God himself, and that there cannot really be any being ‘other’ than God. Such omnipresence is seen as the direct effect of divine goodness... *For only this impossible self-exteriorization will explain how there can be something other to God participating in God, when God is in himself the repletion of being.*<sup>1069</sup>

As he first outlined in *Theology and Social Theory*,<sup>1070</sup> Milbank also appeals to de Lubac’s notion of the *supernatural* in order to shed some light on this difficulty. In 2005, in his short book on de Lubac, Milbank writes:

de Lubac’s theory of the supernatural seeks to remain with the paradox that God who is all in all yet brings about a not-God to share in his nature. Here de Lubac is close to the mystery that God is the God who can be outside himself- and therefore is the God who elevates creatures into deity.

However, it is on this precise point that Milbank again mentions Sophiology, stating that this is a ‘notion explored more rigorously by the Russian Sophianic tradition, especially Bulgakov.’<sup>1071</sup> In the same work he also goes on to state that Bulgakov is ‘one of the two truly great theologians of the twentieth century.’<sup>1072</sup>

<sup>1068</sup> Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, p.XII (my emphasis).

<sup>1069</sup> John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, London, Routledge, 2001, p.37 (my emphasis).

<sup>1070</sup> Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, pp.220-230.

<sup>1071</sup> John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2005, p.77.

<sup>1072</sup> Ibid, p.104.

In 2006, in the preface to the second edition of *Theology and Social Theory*, Milbank again attempts to address the ontological tensions in his theory of participation. This time he appeals to thinkers such as Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) and Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) who emphasize the ‘paradoxical’ relationship between God and creation that is characterized by their ‘coincidence’ as ‘opposites.’ He also explicitly states that ‘the modern Russian tradition of Sophiology has also fundamentally to do with the problematic that I am indicating here.’<sup>1073</sup>

In 2009 Milbank co-authored a work with Slavoj Žižek (*The Monstrosity of Christ*) where he focuses on the theme of paradox within ontological participation. He abandons the ‘principle of non-contradiction’ and attempts to offer some theological and philosophical justification for this decision. Yet the main reason for this move is precisely to try to uphold the paradoxical ontology of participation that is so crucial to this theology. Milbank therefore reaches the point where he needs to ground and express his paradoxical ontology which he attempts to do by utilizing the Russian Sophiological tradition.

According to Milbank, we should not consider this ontology to be a speculative anomaly, as there seems to be a persistently paradoxical, yet fundamental, notion of ‘otherness’ emerging within Christian doctrine more generally: where *difference* must be upheld at the very same time that *identification and unity* must also be maintained. Theologians must *distinguish* between God and creation whilst avoiding pantheism and dualism; the ‘distinctiveness’ of the Persons of the Trinity must be acknowledged, yet without compromising their unity. Similarly, a divine and human nature must be distinguished in Christ, yet without separation or division. Even the slightest adjustment to the ‘paradoxical nature’ of this notion of otherness would result in a whole host of dialectical dichotomies: modalism or tritheism, monophysitism or nestorianism, pantheism or dualism, and so forth. Therefore, Milbank contends that this paradox is a form of *mediation within otherness that attempts to sustain identity within difference*. We are therefore left with an inexpressible mystery within theological attempts to conceive of ‘otherness’ and identity between God and creation; it cannot occur but it simultaneously must: there must be difference; there must be identity; although both need to be distinguished, neither can imply ontological incongruence. At this theological threshold, Milbank is convinced that the Sophiological speculation of the ‘Russian masters’ is the most promising attempt to think

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<sup>1073</sup> Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p.XXVII.

through, and subsequently express, this notion of paradoxical mediation within the theme of participation, and – like his ‘predecessors,’ remains convinced that the biblical figure of Wisdom is in a position to provide theology with a persuasive expression of this form of *mediation*, which he hopes will be able to ‘tackle the problem of a necessary but seemingly impossible mediation that lurks within traditional speculative theology,’<sup>1074</sup> by embodying a mysterious and paradoxical *relationship*, apparent within otherness, that is grounded in the non-competitive and peaceful conception of the same, revealed in Christ - the God-Man – and which is ultimately locatable within the Trinity itself.<sup>1075</sup>

Furthermore, Sophiology also presents itself to Milbank as a tradition, like his own theology, that is markedly at home in the current climate that theological discourse finds itself in, namely, postmodernity. And he believes this to the extent in which the Russian thinkers are grappling with the same post-Hegelian problems that characterize postmodernity and Milbank’s own theology.<sup>1076</sup> According to Milbank, Sophiological speculation succeeds, where Continental philosophy and modern theology has failed, in its responses to the problematic ontological themes of difference and identity which have been produced in classic German philosophy. For instance, the postmodern Continentals Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998), Jaques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze have all remained dissatisfied in their own ways, like the Russian thinkers and Milbank himself, with the ‘Hegelian’ conception of ‘otherness,’ in their case, believing the dialectic to be a means of taming difference and absorbing it into a static identity.<sup>1077</sup> One can read much of Levinas’ and Derrida’s philosophy as

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<sup>1074</sup> John Milbank, ‘Sophiology and Theurgy: the New Theological Horizon’, in Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (eds), *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word*, Surrey, Ashgate, 2009, pp.45-86, p.50.

<sup>1075</sup> Brandon Gallaher has recently lent support to Milbank’s reading of Bulgakov. He claims that Bulgakov’s understanding of Wisdom is grounded in his philosophy of antinomy (антиномия) and that his Sophiological speculation ‘quickly evolved into a metaphor for understanding the tension between God and the world’ (Brandon Gallaher, *There is Freedom: The Dialectic of Freedom and Necessity in the Trinitarian Theologies of Sergii Bulgakov, Karl Barth, and Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 2010, p.46 (Ph.D. Thesis: Oxford; publication forthcoming Oxford)); see also: Jonathan Seiling, *From Antinomy to Sophiology: Modern Russian Religious Consciousness and Sergei Bulgakov’s Critical Appropriation of German Idealism*, Canada, 2008.

<sup>1076</sup> John Milbank, ‘Sophiology and Theurgy: the New Theological Horizon’, in Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (eds), *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word*, Surrey, Ashgate, 2009, pp.45-86, p.50.

<sup>1077</sup> See: Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (trans: Alphonso Lingis), Pittsburgh, Duquesne, 1969, p.296; Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (trans: Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi), Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p.34; Jaques Derrida, *Positions* (trans: Alan Bass), Chicago,

an attempt to re-conceptualize ‘otherness’ in light of a genuine recognition of difference, be it through the Levinasian ‘non-in-difference of Difference,’<sup>1078</sup> or the Derridean *différance*. However, as Milbank has contended, by affirming the ultimate superiority of difference, over and against identity, one seemingly just propagates the ultimacy of *nihilism* (where there is no identity whatsoever).<sup>1079</sup> And, as far as responses to these issues go in modern systematic theology, Jürgen Moltmann, Eberhard Jüngel, Robert Jenson (b.1930), John D. Caputo (b.1940), and even Karl Barth in his own way, for instance, have tended to simply embody Hegelian dialectic within their own theology, often with little filtration.<sup>1080</sup> Hence, continental philosophy and modern theology have ‘failed’ to satisfy the demands of Milbank’s ontological vision, which he believes can find its fullest satisfaction in Sophiological speculation.

Therefore, we have seen that the logic of Milbank’s central commitment to ‘ontological participation’ can threaten to dissolve into pantheism. However, in realizing this possibility, Milbank attempts to avoid this conclusion by simply invoking the absolute ontological difference between God and creation (despite this not being implied by the logic of his theology) and attempting to hold both positions together simultaneously. However, by doing this, Milbank is led to abandon any ‘traditional’ concept of a responsible and accessible epistemology in favor of the notion of ‘paradox.’<sup>1081</sup> In order to be in a position to express this paradoxical conception of

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University of Chicago Press, 1981, p.44; Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (trans: Paul Patton), New York, Columbia, 1994, p.44.

<sup>1078</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Philosophy and Positivity’ (trans: Jeffrey Kosky), in: Regina Schwartz (ed), *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond*, New York, Routledge, 2004, pp.31-43, p.41.

<sup>1079</sup> See: Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, part IV.

<sup>1080</sup> See, for instance: Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism* (trans: Darrell Guder), Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 1983, p.101; Eberhard Jüngel, ‘My Theology – a Short Summary’ and ‘the Revelation of the Hiddenness of God: a Contribution to the Protestant Understanding of the Hiddenness of Divine Action’, in Eberhard Jüngel, *Theological Essays II* (trans: A. Neufeldt-Fast and J.B. Webster), Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1995, pp.1-20 and pp.120-45; Jürgen Moltmann, *God In Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, London, SCM, 1985, pp.86-94; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, London, SCM, 1981, pp.21-61; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, London, SCM, 1974, pp.206-84; Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology I: The Triune God*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp.125-146; John D. Caputo utilizes Hegel in affirming a radical theology devoid of metaphysics (although he criticises Hegel for not going far enough); see: John D. Caputo, ‘The Perversity of the Absolute, the Perverse Core of Hegel, and the Possibility of Radical Theology’, in: Slavoj Žižek, Clayton Crockett and Creston Davis (eds), *Hegel and the Infinite: Religion, Politics, and Dialectic*, New York, Columbia, 2011, pp.47-67. For Barth’s use of Hegelian logic: see: John R. Betz, ‘Beyond the Sublime: the Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being (part 2)’, in *Modern Theology 22:1* pp.1-50, Oxford, Blackwell, 2006; Graham Ward, ‘Barth, Hegel and the Possibility for Christian Apologetics’, in: Jeremy Morris (ed), *Faith and Freedom: Exploring Radical Orthodoxy*, Third Millennium, 2003, pp.17-39.

<sup>1081</sup> See: John Milbank, ‘The Double Glory, or Paradox Versus Dialectics: On Not Quite Agreeing with Slavoj Žižek’, in: Slavoj Žižek, John Milbank, and Creston Davis (eds), *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* London, MIT Press, 2009, p.167.



participation, Milbank requires a mediatory figure that is at once both created and divine or an embodiment of the paradox that Milbank wishes to uphold. This is precisely where Sophia comes in:

The important thing to note is that one can take Sophiology as the attempt to think through the place of mediation...where, it would seem, there cannot possibly *be* any mediation and yet, without it, everything threatens to fall apart...One could say that Sophia names a *metaxu* which does not lie between two poles but rather remains simultaneously at both poles at once. As such it does not subsist before the two poles, but it co-arises with them such that they can only exist according to a mediated communication which remains purely occult, a matter of utterly inscrutable affinity.<sup>1082</sup>

In order for his re-conception of ontological participation to work successfully, Milbank therefore must locate this paradoxical form of mediation within God himself; he must –as he does in fact seek to do - demonstrate that within the Triune life of God, there is an otherness that includes identity (which Milbank conceives as Sophia) which mediates the identity and difference of the divine Persons as well as the divine Essence and Persons themselves; a relationship which is then participated in (to various degrees) by the rest of creation:

One sees the Sophianic principle of ‘impossible mediation’ operating most supremely in the case of the divine Trinity. *The same principle* is then participated in, in various modes, by the creation, by humanity, by the incarnate Logos, by the Mother of God, by the Church, and by what one might call the liturgical-economic process.<sup>1083</sup>

Milbank is convinced that this form of mediation must originate and be grounded within God’s own mode of relating to God’s self as Triune relationship, in order for it to be successful. Thus, after identifying this paradoxical dynamic within the divine Trinity itself, Milbank will then seek to show that all other forms of relating (between God and creation), in whatever mode, must also be inherently connected to, and an integral part of this original mediation within the Trinity. Therefore, the main purpose of Milbank’s Sophiology is to account for this form of mediation within the Trinity, and then to elucidate its place in God’s relationship to creation generally, his relationship to creation through Christ, the ‘ontological interaction’ between God and the world within ‘theurgy,’ and God’s relationship to creation through the Church (also including its Mariological dimensions). All of this is achieved for Milbank through the figure of Sophia.

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<sup>1082</sup> Milbank, *Sophiology and Theurgy*, p.50. This is almost identical to Bulgakov’s own Sophiological project; see the analysis in chapter IV pp.42-45.

<sup>1083</sup> *Ibid*, p.62.

Therefore, we shall now evaluate each component of Milbank's Sophiology in turn, whilst critically discussing its relationship to both the Gnostic concept of Sophia and its biblical counterpart.

### **'Impossible Mediation' Within the Trinity: Sophia as the Divine Essence.**

Milbank's first use of the figure of Sophia occurs within his attempt to ground paradoxical participation or 'otherness' within the divine Trinity itself, where Sophia is adopted in order to provide a form of mediation between the Persons of the Trinity; a certain 'something' if you will, that guarantees their essential unity whilst upholding their hypostatic distinction – which, following Bulgakov, Milbank suggests can be conceptualized as Sophia:

If there were in no sense a shared 'something' (*homoousios* if one likes) involved in substantive relations, then the engendered would be sheerly 'other' to the engendering and the proceeded to the proceeding... Instead, the Son 'is not' the Father as in pure relation to him, but at the same time he 'is' the Father (as Augustine indicates), insofar as the *persona* is not other to the essence and stands forth just as much in respect of being in itself the essence, as in respect of being in itself a substantive relation.<sup>1084</sup>

However, Milbank notes that the traditional conception of mediation for the divine hypostases via the divine essence, itself harbors a further need of mediation in order to uphold 'its' distinction from 'its' inherent relations at the 'intersecting point' of their total unity, and therefore also of the Persons themselves:

Via this point of intersection between relation and essence in the person, the engendered is in some sense the unengendered and the proceeded is likewise in some sense the proceeding. It follows then, that there is in a certain fashion a dynamic substantive mediation between essence and relations which involves also a mediation between the persons themselves.<sup>1085</sup>

Although, as Milbank indicates, any concept of such a mode of mediation would at once threaten to usurp the harmony of the Trinity; for seemingly, it would either need to be another hypostasis (thus suggesting a quaternity as opposed to a Trinity) or some higher essential process of which the Persons would be mere modifications of. Instead, following Bulgakov,<sup>1086</sup> Milbank suggests that this form of mediation could be characterized by its 'hypostaticity;' 'something' (an

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<sup>1084</sup> Ibid, p.54.

<sup>1085</sup> Ibid, p.55.

<sup>1086</sup> See *chapter IV* p.43.

essence) that already approaches the personal, or is defined by its power to personify, without actually being an hypostasis itself:

If there is any third term between the essence and the persons (and in consequence between person and person), this threatens to become itself a fourth hypostasis, or else the persons to be reduced to mere modes of a super-fundamental process... Instead, Bulgakov's point is rather that what is common to the three persons cannot itself be exactly impersonal, even if it is also not exactly in itself a person: therefore it is at once an essence and yet something already approaching the personal.<sup>1087</sup>

Thus, slightly elucidating Bulgakov's rather complicated notion of 'hypostaticity,' Milbank suggests that we can conceive of this mediation as 'the power to characterize,' which is Sophia: the divine world or content (in the Bulgakovian sense) that gives personal shape to the hypostases and thus both identifies them whilst distinguishing them also. 'The possessable and the transferable character of all persons, human and divine, rather derives initially from the 'shape' that they derive from the objective world... Personal character arises from the subjective alteration of objectivity.'<sup>1088</sup> According to Milbank, after the suggestions of Bulgakov, this relationship between essence and its characterizing hypostasis is common to all intellectual beings: human and divine: 'hence even the infinite persons of the Trinity cannot be personal... simply in themselves and as relational, unless they are always mediating and are equally mediated by an objective personifying power.'<sup>1089</sup> Here, Milbank is entrenched in the German philosophical theme of the subject/object relationship, albeit through Bulgakov's theological lens.

Interestingly, Milbank flirts with the possibility of this mediating principle being a 'self-grounded hypostasis' but rather surprisingly rejects this option on the basis of the authority of Bulgakov's own *Kantian* understanding of ontology and epistemology and their mutual relationship. Milbank therefore seems to affirm, with *Kant* and Bulgakov, that *being* must be epistemologically registered in a 'comprehending other' for it *to be* at all: 'as Bulgakov recognized, one cannot take Being alone to be the primary principle. What is, manifests itself,

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<sup>1087</sup> Ibid, p.55.

<sup>1088</sup> Ibid, p.56. For Bulgakov's understanding of the relationship between essence and hypostasis see: *chapter IV* pp.54-55.

<sup>1089</sup> Ibid, p.57.

else it is unthinkable.’<sup>1090</sup> As we have already seen in Bulgakov, Milbank then faces the problem of positing the necessity of a ‘comprehending other’ that appears to be crucial and essential to God’s own existence:

If we posit an initial Being which is ‘one,’ and insist that it can only be if it shows itself, then we have immediately also to posit a ‘second,’ which is the receiving capacity. The problem of mediation between the expressing first and the expressed – and so it would seem, reflexively expressed – second, then arises.<sup>1091</sup>

After analyzing attempts made by Hegel and Schelling to account for this ‘comprehending otherness,’ Milbank concludes that both positions are marred by an agonistic process that fails to account for a peaceful notion of original and harmonious difference: ‘neither Hegel nor Schelling therefore, entertained the truly radical thought of a real original difference exceeding any tensional process of development.’<sup>1092</sup> In an attempt to propose an alternative to these positions, Milbank invokes the figure of Wisdom (or more specifically, its original duplication) to account for an original, yet peaceful, otherness that comprises the very existence of God:

If one does entertain this [Sophiological mediation], then one can project the epistemological necessity of original twoness onto the ontological plane... Then one is confronted with the mystery of Sophia, of original mediation... That which *is*, is dynamic self-expressive life, but as such it is also the otherness of active reception of this dynamism. It is, indeed, super-eminent sperm and womb, forever conjoined and forever apart.<sup>1093</sup>

Given Milbank’s characterization of the divine essence as Sophia, the problem of the ‘comprehending other’ appears to be resolved through a thoroughly Trinitarian schema, without implying the necessity of the divine creation. For, as we have already seen, Bulgakov appeared to suggest that the ‘comprehending other’ was ultimately the creation itself (put more simply, for

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<sup>1090</sup> Ibid, p.57. As to be expected, there is no acknowledgement of Kant here, instead Milbank tries to ground his position in Gregory of Nyssa’s suggestion that the transcendent God is known in his *dynamis* which is his self-manifestation (see, Gregory of Nyssa, *On Not Three Gods: To Ablabius*). Although there are undoubtedly some similarities here, it seems unlikely that Nyssa would have gone on to suggest that the creation’s need for God’s self-manifestation in his power or economy, could be reversed to imply the necessity of the creation as the comprehending other that God needs in order *to be*, as Milbank and Bulgakov would seem to imply. More recently, Quentin Meillassoux has argued against this ontological connection between knowing and being, proposing instead that being is independent of subjectivity (whether divine or human) (see: Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, London, Continuum, 2009).

<sup>1091</sup> Milbank, *Sophiology and Theurgy*, p.57.

<sup>1092</sup> Ibid, p.60.

<sup>1093</sup> Ibid, pp.60-61. There are similarities here, with the Trinitarian ontology that Milbank outlines in *Theology and Social Theory* (see: Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, pp.423-427), and John Milbank, ‘The Return of Mediation,’ in: John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek, and Creston Davis (eds), *Paul’s New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology*, Brazos Press, 2010, pp.211-239, p.222.

Bulgakov, the second Person of the Trinity and creation were interchangeable), thus necessitating its own existence and blurring the ontological boundary between God and the world, which appeared to merge into one single process of divine self-becoming (as we have seen, after the pattern of Schelling and Hegel). However, by affirming that the ‘comprehending other’ is a natural expression of the self-expressive love of God and locating this dynamic within the Sophiological life of the divine Trinity itself, Milbank is able to affirm God’s total aseity, and subsequently uphold the clear distinction between God the Son and the creation, as well as the pure gratuity of the creative act as unnecessary to God’s own existence:

One must indeed conceive of the divine essence as Sophia, a characterizing power...character can be communicated from one person to another, and there can arise a kind of collective character. Indeed for character to be character at all as an expressive showing forth, it must be in principle communicable and must even be actually communicated in some measure. Thus all of the Godhead is characterized and all the persons of the Trinity share in and hypostasize the power to give which is also the power to receive that marks life as such and supremely intellectual life.<sup>1094</sup>

Therefore, we have noted Milbank’s adoption of the Wisdom figure in his attempts to ground a specific conception of paradox within the divine Trinitarian life, and despite accepting some of the key insights of Bulgakov’s Sophiology, he seems to have avoided the implications of the complex issue surrounding the relationship between epistemology and ontology, and the reflexive need of the ‘comprehending other,’ that was so instrumental in Bulgakov’s theology for introducing elements of Gnostic mythology into his Sophiology, by locating this process within the complete dynamic life of the Trinity itself. Thus, Sophiological Trinitarian mediation upholds and even requires the unity and the distinction between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Despite its indebtedness to Bulgakov, this Trinitarian theology, which Milbank espouses here, is clearly more closely related to the concept of Sophia that was identified in the biblical tradition as opposed to the one existing within the Gnostic narratives. Wisdom is identified with the divine Son, in a manner that is typical of Pauline and Johanine wisdom theology. Although this theme is elaborated to include the notion of the divine essence, also characterized as Sophia, this development simply appeared to be a logical progression from identifying the Son with Wisdom, as that which holds the Trinity in interpersonal communion must be said of all three Persons of the Trinity. Milbank is clear that the generation of the Son is not synonymous with the creation

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<sup>1094</sup> Milbank, *Sophiology and Theurgy*, p.61.

of the world as it was for Bulgakov and Valentinus, where Sophia and her fall were equated with the existence of the world. We shall now explore Milbank's further Sophiological developments.

### **'Impossible Mediation:' God and the World.**

Having 'grounded' his conception of 'paradoxical mediation' within a Trinitarian ontology, Milbank now has the task of showing how created existence relates to, and participates in this divine life. And, although Milbank may have initially appeared to have avoided Bulgakov's conflation of God the Son and the world with his need for the 'comprehending other,' his commitment to a particular conception of ontological participation may after all render all other forms of being and mediation as mere modes of this initial fundamental process at play within the divine Trinity itself. For, according to Milbank:

In the above fashion one sees the Sophianic principle of 'impossible mediation' operating most supremely in the case of the divine Trinity. *The same principle* is then participated in, in various modes, by the creation, by humanity, by the incarnate Logos, by the Mother of God, by the Church, and by what one might call the liturgical-economic process.<sup>1095</sup>

Therefore, Milbank is now trying to articulate the place of created otherness within the Sophiological mediation of the divine Trinity, which seems an impossible and paradoxical task given the ubiquity of the process itself: 'in the case of the whole of the creation, how can it possibly exist at all? There is nothing but God, in his ubiquity. If there is also the creation as well as God, then the creation must lie within God.'<sup>1096</sup> This theological theme that Milbank is grappling with is by no means a new issue within his theology. It can be seen throughout Milbank's theology and most notably in his formulation of the concept of 'gift' (so integral to Milbankian thought). The French anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1872-1950) once argued that a gift can never be 'pure'; by which he appeared to suggest that every gift solicited a counter-gift and that in the act of giving, even if this is disguised, a contract was established that provoked the necessity of a gift's reciprocation. Thus a seemingly endless process of contractual giving ensues and regulates society. Mauss states that there is a 'rule of legality and self-

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<sup>1095</sup> Ibid, p.62 (my emphasis).

<sup>1096</sup> Ibid. This is not an uncommon theme in Milbank's theology; he grapples with it at various points and it seems to be an inherent tension in his participation metaphysics. For instance, he has also referred to it as the problem of 'the impossibility of creation' (Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, p.63).

interest...[which] compels the gift that has been received to be obligatorily reciprocated.<sup>1097</sup>

Derrida is the first major thinker to engage with the philosophical and ethical implications of Mauss' findings, and although accepts the thesis that a pure gift is impossible, nevertheless argues that accompanying the gift is a distinguished act of giving which can be utterly unreciprocated and totally unilateral and not impossible. Such a mode of giving is closely associated with madness for Derrida, yet this is not necessarily a negative phenomenon.<sup>1098</sup>

Milbank engages with Derrida and Mauss in an attempt to explore the theological implications of this understanding of the gift. He argues that if God is Trinity, then the Father's act of giving in the generation of the Son (the gift) - through the Spirit – already entails a reciprocation in gratitude. However, within the Trinity the act of giving, the gift and gratitude all occur simultaneously in the same act. Rejecting Derrida's idea of a pure act of giving without reception, Milbank insists that there must be reception and gratitude if the economy of gift is to ever get off the ground. If there was no receiver, then there would be no gift. For Milbank, this is a Trinitarian and interpersonal understanding of gift; the gift establishes relationships. Milbank ultimately extends this Trinitarian schema to include the act of creation. Creation is given, and is indeed a gift, insofar as it is reciprocated. For this reason, Milbank must insist (like Bulgakov before him, although for slightly different reasons) on the primacy of the angelic and human spiritual creation 'before' the world as it were, otherwise the gift could not be received. We shall discuss shortly, the theological challenges that Milbank faces when attempting to account for this ontology in light of Darwinian theory, which asserts that humanity was the product of an evolutionary adaptation of species and was not ontologically 'prior' to the material creation. It is in response to this difficulty that Milbank does come close to adopting Gnostic Sophiological themes. Furthermore, it is also this ontology that leads Milbank to assert that at the base of creation there exists a divine reception of the gift of creation. According to Milbank this implies that creation is indeed 'kenotic' insofar as the gift could be rejected or ignored and indeed is when the perfect reception of this gift in Mary and Christ is established and rejected by the wider human community. Although, this is the context in which this issue is developed within Milbank's theology, within Wisdom theology this question could be considered as a slightly modified version of the Valentinian monistic 'problem of finitude,' if the Sophiological

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<sup>1097</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, London, Routledge, 2005, p.4.

<sup>1098</sup> On this topic see: Marko Zlomislac, *Jacques Derrida's Aporetic Ethics*, Plymouth, Lexington, 2007, p.103.

dynamism of the divine life of the Trinity is, ‘all that there is’ ontologically speaking, then how is finitude to be accounted for? And as Milbank has already suggested, the answer to this aporia appears to be by locating it within the divine life itself; hence the creation becomes another aspect to the process of othering that is the life of the Trinity itself: ‘If the creation lies within God, God must inversely lie within the creation. God must be also that in himself which goes outside God... Since God is all in all, at the bottom of that nullity which is alone proper to the creation must lie God.’<sup>1099</sup> Thus, at first glance, creation, as it was in Bulgakov’s Sophiology, is subsumed under the role of the ‘comprehending other,’ given that the ubiquity of the ‘othering process’ renders no other ontological space available where such an implication would not present itself. Milbank is now facing the difficult task, that Bulgakov had engaged with previously, of attempting to account for genuine ontological difference between God and the world, when the world appears to be an integral and necessary part of the process of the divine life itself. Milbank explicitly rejects Schelling and Hegel’s dialectical account of this same dynamic, yet he is aware of how similar their proposals seem, after all Milbank could be said to embody Schelling and Hegel’s own logic within his proposal, Hegel’s affirmation that, for instance: ‘otherness is not something different outside it, but its own moment... something is *in* itself the other of itself,’<sup>1100</sup> appears to be very close to what Milbank is here suggesting. However, Milbank is well aware of the risks of his theological positions and is consistent in his attempts to avoid these conclusions in realizing the implications of his theological logic. Milbank categorically rejects suggestions of Gnostic pantheism, however not by denying that they are the logical conclusions of his theological reasoning as may have been expected, but by appealing to the mystery of paradox (by simultaneously affirming both the conclusion of his position and its negation – something very close to Bulgakov’s antinomical methodology):

Between God and creation then, there is no between. To suppose so would be idolatry. On the other hand, if the created order univocally enjoys its own existence which sufficiently possesses existence as finite being, then there is after all, by the working of an inexorable dialectic, a third term, namely ‘being,’ invoked as lying between God and the creation and thereby threatening

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<sup>1099</sup> Milbank, *Sophiology and Theurgy*, p.63. Milbank also states this explicitly elsewhere, for instance: ‘there can be a created exterior to God, because God’s interior is self-exteriorization’ (John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, London, Routledge, 2001, p.86).

<sup>1100</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (Trans: T.F. Geraet), Cambridge, Hackett Publishing, 1991, p.148.



idolatrously to include them both. To avoid this outcome one must rather say that all created being borrows its being from God who alone fully 'is' or is 'to be.'<sup>1101</sup>

However, this divine act of 'donating existence' does little to ease the theological and ontological tensions which Milbank's Sophiology has generated; as what is donated appears to be nothing else but God's own self –seemingly only confirming that creation is indeed a duplicated aspect of God's own being:

By an unforeclosed and mysteriously harmonious dialectic (unlike that of Hegel), what shares in God through its very unlikeness to God can only do so because it is also precisely like, *indeed identical with the Godhead* in its hidden heart. If nullity shares in being, then at bottom created things are God in some sense and God is in some sense created.<sup>1102</sup>

Therefore, Milbank can only affirm the paradoxical nature of participation and Sophiological mediation, as he notes:

To avoid at this point either acosmism or pantheism...the best we can do is to affirm both these further strange impossibilities at once. Sophia is creation in God; Sophia is also God in creation. There is not one Sophia, hovering onto-theologically between God and creation; there are two Sophias on two sides of the chasm, yet somehow their deep-beyond-deep affinity renders them after all but one.<sup>1103</sup>

In order to affirm these paradoxical positions, Milbank is forced to abandon the 'principle of non-contradiction,' which – by doing so - he hopes to be able to affirm both the logical conclusion of his theological reasoning (that God and the world, are at base identical), and its negation (that God always ontologically exceeds the world), and after the pattern of Bulgakov's antinomical method, uphold both truths simultaneously without a final synthesis. He attempts to mediate and express this antinomy/paradox, via the figure of Wisdom who is claimed to be both God in the world and the world in God. For Milbank, 'paradox' is the most theologically sound

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<sup>1101</sup> Milbank, *Sophiology and Theurgy*, pp.64-65.

<sup>1102</sup> Ibid, p.65. This is by no means an isolated instant confined to Milbank's Sophiology. When appealing to the thought of Eckhart, Milbank argues that: 'to ensure that God is not trumped by *esse*, one must indeed face up more radically to the aporias of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*: if this doctrine insists that God is the plentitude of being and that all created being derives from God, then in some sense the ground of created being must be uncreated' (John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory :Beyond Secular Reason* (second edition), Oxford, Blackwell, 2006, p.XXVI). Similarly, 'Eckhart therefore claims that, while the relation of creature to Creator remains always analogical, that nonetheless the relation of the soul to God in its ground is univocal. Since there is a horizontal 'univocity' between the Persons of the Trinity who are equal in being...within whose dynamic the souls is ultimately included' (Ibid, p.XXVII).

<sup>1103</sup> Milbank, *Sophiology and Theurgy*, p.65.

strategy for avoiding German dialectical ‘tragic gnosis’<sup>1104</sup> and the agonistic narratives that it can often invite between God and the world, in this sense he is very close to Bulgakov and his post-Hegelian ‘antinomical way,’ for both seemingly accept the logic of oppositional thought, yet reject any synthesizing mediation: ‘the alternative...is paradox – which one can also name ‘analogy,’ ‘real relation,’ ‘realism’ (regarding universals), or (after William Desmond) the ‘metaxological.’’<sup>1105</sup> Similarly, ‘the ‘paradoxical’ outlook does not require to be ‘completed’ by a dialectical one.’<sup>1106</sup> According to Milbank, the appeal to paradox is a necessary radicalization of Aquinas’ understanding of analogy invoked to combat the ‘Scotist’ reading and subsequent rejection of it. He believes that this was initially carried out by Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa, as he states:

Eckhart and Cusanus, in defending analogy against the Scotist charge that it violated the principle of non-contradiction, conceded the point while arguing that the logic of infinity and of infinite/finite relations requires this violation. In doing so the in effect admitted that an analogical logic is also a paradoxical logic.<sup>1107</sup>

However, Milbank is keen to defend his understanding of paradox and Sophiology (within his commitment to ontological participation) and distinguish it from mere nonsense or a careless mistake in reasoning. To do so, he appeals to a meta-logic, deeply influenced by Nicholas of Cusa that *logically* disregards the principle of non-contradiction by appealing to the infinite:

Can we really accept that we all the time see (or sense with all the senses) what we cannot possibly think? Yes, we can, if we reflexively think through the difference between the finite and the infinite, and yet the inter-involvement of the two. One finite thing cannot be its opposite, nor can one finite thing both be and not be another finite at the same time, in the same place, and in the same respect. If, however, we suppose that there “is” an infinite, then this logic no longer applies. For it is a logic which transcendently supposes the notion of “limit,” of “delimitation,” else it cannot operate. But in the infinite there is no presupposed limit – therefore one way to speak of the infinite is to say that here all opposites coincide, all differences are also similarities, and vice versa. One can think the absolute simple infinite only as paradox.<sup>1108</sup>

<sup>1104</sup> John Milbank, ‘Materialism and Transcendence,’ in: John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek, and Creston Davis (eds), *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, Duke University Press, 2005, pp.393-427, p.404.

<sup>1105</sup> John Milbank, ‘The Double Glory, or Paradox Versus Dialectics: On Not Quite Agreeing with Slavoj Žižek’, in: Slavoj Žižek, John Milbank, and Creston Davis (eds), *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* London, MIT Press, 2009, p.112.

<sup>1106</sup> Ibid, p.114.

<sup>1107</sup> Ibid, p.164. Milbank further elucidates his admiration of Eckhart and Cusa in: John Milbank, ‘Life, or Gift and Glissando,’ in: *Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics: Vol 1, num 1,2* (2012), pp.121-51.

<sup>1108</sup> Milbank, *The Double Glory*, p.167.

One can find an almost identical method of reasoning in Nicholas of Cusa's *De Docta Ignorantia*:

I call "maximum" that beyond which there can be nothing greater. Fullness, of course, is fitting and proper to what is one. Thus, unity, which is also being, coincides with maximumness, and if such a unity is completely free from all relation and contraction, it is clear that because it is absolute maximumness, nothing is opposed to it. Accordingly, the maximum is the absolute one that is all things, and all things are in this maximum, for it is the maximum. And because the maximum has no opposite, the minimum coincides with it as well, and therefore the maximum is also in all things.<sup>1109</sup>

And again:

Oppositions...apply only to those things that admit a greater and a lesser, and they apply in different ways, but never to the absolutely maximum, for it is above all opposition. Therefore, because the absolutely maximum is absolutely and actually all that can be, and it is without opposition to such an extent that the minimum coincides with the maximum, it is above all affirmation and all negation. It both is and is not all that is conceived to be, and it both is and is not all that is conceived not to be. But it is a "this" in such a way that it is all things, and it is all things in such a way that it is none of them, and it is a "this" maximally in such a way that it is also a "this" minimally.<sup>1110</sup>

Building on these insights, Milbank further suggests that there can be no formal distinction between the finite and the infinite:

We cannot conceive of any bounds to the finite as such: we must assume that the finite "goes on forever" and, moreover, that it does so as much microscopically as macroscopically. This leads us to question whether there truly are any strictly finite things without qualification, outside the sphere of logical supposition.<sup>1111</sup>

And similarly, even if one were to imagine an 'independent' finitude, this could only be possible if it were the product of a descent of the infinite: 'if, nevertheless, something besides God impossibly exists, then this is because God in himself is an ecstatic, generating God who goes beyond God.'<sup>1112</sup>

Therefore, it is clear that Milbank is proposing a theological method that is very closely related to Bulgakov's 'antinomism' (which was discussed in Chapter V), when constructing his

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<sup>1109</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, 'On Learned Ignorance, I:III,' in: H. Lawrence Bond, *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, New York, Paulist Press, 1997, p.89.

<sup>1110</sup> Ibid, I:IV, p.92.

<sup>1111</sup> Milbank, *The Double Glory*, p.167.

<sup>1112</sup> Ibid, p.191.

Sophiology. However, whereas Bulgakov seemed to require an abandonment of ‘traditional’ epistemological principles for an ascetic or kenotic acceptance of an encountered revelatory truth on faith, Milbank attempts to provide a ‘reasonable’ foundation for his acceptance of paradox and dismissal of the principle of non-contradiction. For, once we have accepted the reality of the infinite (and Milbank believes there are good reasons for doing so; the seemingly infinite possibilities of finitude itself for instance), which is utterly unbounded and never comprised of any sort of limit, the principle of non-contradiction can simply not be sustained. For a contradiction to occur, there must be a definitive boundary where particulars are opposed to each other, yet this is precisely what appears to be amiss within the infinite itself, which would further imply that no contradiction could possibly occur ‘here.’ Thus, to claim that creation is both simultaneously God and other to God, although seemingly impossible to ‘comprehend’ from our finite perspective, can be accepted as truth in light that all contradictions coincide within the infinite, where they are resolved. Although Milbank’s ‘paradoxical way’ has made some significant developments to Bulgakov’s antinomism, there still appears to be several latent tensions within his suggestions.

Firstly, at an initial glance, Milbank’s notion of the infinite (grounded in Cusa’s thought), which is so central to his theological logic, appears to be notably disengaged from modern mathematical and scientific theories of infinity, many of which reject Cusa’s conception of infinity. Perhaps, the most significant philosophical exploration of modern mathematical theories of infinity has been conducted by Alain Badiou, notably in his engagement with Georg Cantor (1845-1918). Utilizing Cantor’s proposals, Badiou argues that infinity as a merely negative concept, used to mark out a finite boundary for the world and function as an attribute of the One (God) in which the former participates in the latter, is simply unsustainable in light of modern mathematics. According to Badiou, there is no one single infinity, but rather infinite multiples patterned on set theory. Infinity:

Is not the negative name of the supreme-being, the sign of an exception in which a hierarchical punctuality is distinguished that is thinkable as the being-of-the-one...it is evident to what degree Cantor’s oeuvre completes and accomplishes the historical Galilean gesture: there at the very point where, in Greek and then in Greco-Christian thought, an essential appropriation of being as finite was based – infinity being the ontic attribute of the divine difference – it is on the contrary

of being as such and of it alone that infinity is from this point on predicated, in the form of the notion of an 'infinite set.'<sup>1113</sup>

Prior to Cantor, infinity functioned as a purely limiting concept within knowledge, it was always out of reach epistemologically. However, as Badiou illustrates:

The mathematical ontologization of the infinite separates it absolutely from the one, which is not. If pure multiples are what must be recognized as infinite, it is ruled out that there be some one-infinity. There will necessarily be some infinite multiples. But what is more profound still is that there is no longer any guarantee that we will be able to recognize a simple concept of the infinite-multiple, for if such a concept were legitimate, the multiples appropriate to it would, in some manner, be supreme, being no 'less multiple' than others. In this case infinity would lead us back to the supremely-being, in the mode of a halting point which would be assigned to the thought of the pure multiple, given that there would be nothing beyond the infinite multiples. Therefore, what must be expected instead is that there be infinite multiples which can be differentiated from each other to infinity.<sup>1114</sup>

In other places, Milbank does engage with Badiou's understanding of infinity and acknowledges the challenges it poses to his theology. However, Milbank argues that Badiou has condensed the theological conception of infinity into a strict dialectical 'Scotist' distinction between the finite and the infinite. Whereas, according to Milbank's reading of Aquinas for instance, the infinite never functions in this way, but rather includes finitude's participation within the infinite. Thus, Badiou's thesis on the immanence of infinity is based on a 'decision' as convincing as any other. Milbank does not feel compelled to accept Badiou's notion of the infinite nor his critiques of the theological infinite that Milbank relies upon here.<sup>1115</sup>

However, there are further implications, for if one were to actually accept Milbank's contention, then there would appear to be no communicable framework from which truth could be distinguished from falsity. Could Milbank's principle be invoked solely to affirm the truth of Christian revelation? It would appear possible in principle that one could just as legitimately affirm that squared circles, although from our finite perspective, appear to be mutually exclusive and therefore contradictory, may ultimately be perfectly compatible within an unbounded infinity. Presumably, Milbank would want to draw a clear distinction between the paradoxes that he upholds and the mere mistakes or contradictions like the one just outlined. Yet, how could such a distinction be made, when both options appear possible from Milbank's suggestions?

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<sup>1113</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, London, Bloombury, 2007, p.151.

<sup>1114</sup> Ibid, pp.151-52.

<sup>1115</sup> See: Hollis Phelps, *Alain Badiou: Between Theology and Anti-Theology*, London, Routledge, 2013, p.43.

How could we decide when to apply the principle of non-contradiction and when to ignore it? There appears to be no other reason than Milbank's own preference. If truth claims are only regulated and constructed within a particular discourse based on choice, one runs the risk of permanently grounding truth in personal (even if communally personal, including a given state or government) motivations of power.<sup>1116</sup>

Furthermore, despite Milbank insisting on his distance from German dialectical thought, as we have already identified in chapter V, antinomical, metaxalogical, and now paradoxical reasoning, all appear to be much closer to Gnostic wisdom dialectic than to biblical wisdom theology's insistence on original harmony between God and creation. After all, as we have consistently shown throughout this thesis, any theology that begins by thinking of God and creation as ontological opposites, inevitably must find some form of mediation to 'bridge' this ontological incongruence, which more often than not ends in total identity. Thus, like Bulgakov, and Schelling and Hegel before him, Milbank seems to dialectically affirm that what at first appears to be different is in fact ultimately identical. Therefore, in the case of Milbank, what first appears to be incompatible is demonstrated to be identical when viewed from the 'infinite' perspective: 'for at the depths we are identical with God.'<sup>1117</sup> However, to avoid this kind of dialectic, which can propound Gnostic Wisdom theology (as seen in chapter II) one need only refuse to acknowledge the necessity of thinking God and the world as opposites in the first place; the premise of all dialectical reasoning begins where biblical Wisdom theology sees no original problem. For, whether one 'begins' theologically from a Barthian insistence on the revelation of Christ or from a creation theology, the outcome will be the same: God and the world are not ontologically opposed; to be God does not exclude creation and vice versa. Rahner exemplifies this point excellently when stating that:

If immediacy to God is not to be an *absolute contradiction* right from the start, it cannot depend on the fact that what is not God absolutely disappears when God draws near. As God he does not

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<sup>1116</sup> Perhaps, this critique further substantiates those commentators that have acknowledged certain 'totalitarian' tendencies in Milbank's theology, for instance, Mary Doak has written: 'Milbank leaves no doubt that he considers his Christian story to be superior to any and all other temporal views, and to need no correction from them...It can only give us further pause that Milbank defends the use of violence to constrain those who would damage themselves by refusing to act in accordance with this story. Can we be so sure that a Milbankian clarity about the Christian story is an antidote to the horrors of history and not simply another basis for future horrors?' (Mary Doak, *Reclaiming Narrative for Public Theology*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2004, p.32).

<sup>1117</sup> John Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2013, p.223.

have to find a place by having something else which is not him make room. For at least the presence of God as the transcendental ground and horizon of everything which exists and everything which knows (and this is a presence of God, an immediacy to him) takes place precisely in and through the presence of the finite existence.<sup>1118</sup>

As we have noted, the theological challenge which Milbank is attempting to address is how to account for an authentic finite existence that is not God. Despite Milbank's rigorous attempts to do this, it would seem, at least to some, unsuccessful. If one is not convinced that a genuine finite/created existence is theologically accounted for, then it would appear that we are left with a fundamental ontological monism that is not unrelated to the founding Valentinian wisdom presupposition, which is in contrast to the biblical concept of Wisdom. As noted, throughout the archaeological shifts of the positions that have informed Milbank's Sophiology, the primary commitment to a fundamental monism has consistently and historically generated the 'problem of finitude' and otherness, which then must be dialectically accounted for and explained; yet, given the fact that it should not *be* at all, must then be synthetically negated in order to be reunited to complete the original monism. From our previous analyses, we have witnessed how the figure of Wisdom is called into the equation to account for this opprobrious otherness – typically through a metaphysical fall narrative – that is then eschatologically reunited to the monistic Absolute. We are able to identify this transition almost immediately in Milbank's Sophiology, as soon as the problem of finitude emerges:

The heart of creation, Sophia, is somehow dragged downwards... Thus Bulgakov declared that "Sophia – primordial humanity – as the soul of the world" may realize the dark side of its being in exercising a blind and chaotic will. So there is, *as the Christian Gnostics intimated*, albeit in a heterodox mode, also a *fallen Sophia* to be constantly sought out and recovered through art, through good science, through the contemplation of nature – for there is something here not merely to be redeemed, but also a lost spark of beauty presently trapped under the spell of evil, that is yet for the moment missing from the plentitude of beauty as such.<sup>1119</sup>

However, Milbank does attempt to avoid the Valentinian implications inherent to Russian Sophiology by making several subtle alterations to their proposal. Firstly, although he does explicitly acknowledge a metaphysical fall narrative, he attempts to suggest that fallen Sophia is *not* recuperated through the history of creation, but instead argues that the fall is eternally resolved (a position that is very close to Schelling's theogony):

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<sup>1118</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (trans: William V. Dych), New York, Crossroads, 1989, p.83.

<sup>1119</sup> Milbank, *Sophiology and Theurgy*, p.69.

The eternal Adam is only the universal human hypostasizing power. The fall of man impairs this essence, but by rights this should lead to absolute extinction for both human essence and human hypostases. It only does not do so because, in some sense, when Sophia falls to become the sinister “Achamoth” according to Bulgakov, the heavenly Sophia is “impossibly” affected, and God cannot suffer, even for a hypothetical “instance,” a loss to his glory. It is as if he only maintains his aseity, which of course he cannot not do, through the retrieval of languished glory.<sup>1120</sup>

Milbank further reiterates this point by suggesting that the historical Incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth is a formality, given that the fallen-Sophia/ eternal humanity is immediately restored from all eternity, and therefore descends with Christ in his Incarnation to present the ideal humanity which has already been realized in God: ‘through all eternity the essence is immediately restored. So much is this the case that, when God as the divine Son descends in the Incarnation, so also does the eternal humanity.’<sup>1121</sup> However, Milbank here appears to challenge the biblical insistence on the historical tangibility of the Incarnation. The Incarnation is the revelation of knowledge of an ontological fact that has occurred from all eternity. Although this may initially imply clear Gnostic overtones, in the background is Milbank’s adoption of de Lubac’s insistence on transcendental knowledge. For instance:

God, Moses says, made man in his image...And so one cannot say that this knowledge, at its root, is a human acquisition, it is an “image,” and “imprint,” a “seal.” It is the mark of God upon us. We do not construct it, we do not borrow it from elsewhere; it is in us...it is our very selves...It comes before the operation of will and intellect, presupposed by consciousness itself.<sup>1122</sup>

Milbank echoes this sentiment in a radicalized format: ‘the most interior reality of created things simply is God, and humans as reflective have conscious access to this interiority.’<sup>1123</sup> Thus, the implication of Milbank’s position to have access to originary gnosis of the divine is perhaps more appropriately understood as an indication of his commitment to transcendental knowledge of the divine through a doctrine of creation that has been informed by his close early reading of de Lubac. Milbank is clearly aware of the implications of his position, and seeks to clarify it by suggesting that the historical incarnation does indeed mark the final restitution of the fallen Sophia:

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<sup>1120</sup> Ibid, p.78.

<sup>1121</sup> Ibid, p.79.

<sup>1122</sup> Henri de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 1996, pp.6-7.

<sup>1123</sup> Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order*, p.102.



The eternal divine humanity, or human essence, or Adam-Kadmon – at once the first and the second Adam spoken of by Paul – is itself eternally saved and united with God entirely because of the unique descent of the Logos at one specific point in human history. Here alone occurs the event of the final finding and retrieving of the lost and fallen Sophia.<sup>1124</sup>

This gives a slightly different emphasis on the narrative itself, to the extent that history then becomes the necessary forum for Sophia's 'recovery;' history itself becomes the teleological process by which finitude is negated and absorbed back into the monistic whole.

However, whichever option Milbank were to select, there is very little difference between them both, given the fact that creation *is* God insofar as creation is an integral aspect of the intra-Trinitarian life of the Godhead itself, the 'comprehending other;' whether this drama is played out and resolved within history or is eternally restored, amounts to the same thing, as in both instances God and the world appear to be a part of one fundamental process of God's emerging self-awareness, and that is the case whether one 'finitizes' God or eternalizes the world, and it is precisely in this respect that Milbank upholds that 'from all eternity God has always been the God-man and the Russians are right: the theanthropic exceeds even the theological.'<sup>1125</sup> In order to fully grasp this issue it is necessary to briefly revisit a theme highlighted earlier, namely Milbank's theological insistence on the primacy of the angelic and human spiritual creation over material creation and the implications this commitment has for Darwinian theory.

As Solovyov and Bulgakov realized before Milbank, an appeal to a metaphysical fall can permit the theological insistence on the primacy of angelic and human spiritual form while also accounting for the apparent barbarism of natural selection as being a product of a fall as opposed to the manner in which the divine creative act is realized, bringing good out of a necessary evil. Within Milbank's Sophiology he does entertain this Russian and ultimately Gnostic position, as we have just seen. However, elsewhere he does offer alternatives. In his essay *Life, or Gift and Glissando: Evolution, Vitalism and Transcendence* (20), Milbank argues that orthodox Darwinian theory and proponents of the 'creation by design' Christians both hold in common a misconception of the divine, ultimately as a being among other beings acting in a manner that forces one to choose natural selection or divine causation; both compete on the same plane within this conception of God. However, after Milbank spends some time unpacking and

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<sup>1124</sup> Milbank, *Sophiology and Theurgy*, p.79.

<sup>1125</sup> *Ibid*, p.80.

challenging this conception, he then proposes that the evolutionary process be understood teleologically as one directed by the essential form of a given species which individuals are called to realize in their existence:

One must still think of the living individual as in some sense instantiating a formal essence. But this is further to imply that, as for Aristotle, specific form itself (however mysteriously) “explains” in an ultimate and unsurpassable fashion. Moreover, since the nature of living form is to grow and to reproduce within certain regular and yet not entirely theoretically delimitable parameters...then this form is inherently “teleological” in the sense that its collective nature as internally moving and self-replicating across time...is participated in by individual living organisms, who in this non-intentional sense “aim towards” their pre-defined fulfillment and flourishing.<sup>1126</sup>

Within this article, Milbank does not share the Russian distaste for the price of the teleological product of evolution and has a much less pessimistic view that does not require a theodicy. He does not require a fall to account for the ontological formal angelic and human primacy. And, moreover, a properly non-dialectical or analogical conception of God does not forbid the coincidence of the creator and creation within this dynamic process of collaboration.

Therefore, we have seen that Milbank uses the concept of Wisdom (deeply indebted to Bulgakov here) in this instance to ground a paradoxical relationship between God and creation, one that both upholds their identity while affirming their distinction. We noted that Milbank struggled to account for a distinct ontological difference between God and creation to the extent that we argued that it fell into a monistic ontology. Milbank then adopted notions from the Gnostic concept of Sophia to account for the distinction between God and the world, most notably in a metaphysical fall narrative (which he appeared to have sourced from Bulgakov). Within this portion of Milbank’s Sophiology, it is clear that he is more closely indebted to the Gnostic concept of Wisdom adopting both a founding monism and a metaphysical fall narrative. We shall now explore Milbank’s Christology and eschatology in the context of his Sophiology.

### **Sophiology in Milbank’s Theurgy, Theosis, and Christology.**

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<sup>1126</sup> John Milbank, ‘Life, or Gift and Glissando: Evolution, Vitalism and Transcendence’, in: Neil Turnbull, *Radical Orthodoxy: Annual Review I*, Cascade, 2012, pp.87-114, p.93.

Although, as we have just noted, Milbank does explore alternative ways of engaging with modern Darwinian theory and emphasizing the formal priority of the human and angelic creations, however, within his Sophiology – following Solovyov and Bulgakov (and the Idealist tradition before them) – he does appeal to a metaphysical fall to account for the nature of the current state of the relationship between the world and God. Having made this move, his Sophiology must now account for how the original monism is to be restored. He elucidates the nature of the interaction between God and the fallen world, which is constantly moving towards the ‘recovery’ of fallen Sophia, typified in Milbank’s conception of deification and the incarnation. Milbank’s favored mode of engaging with such an interaction between God and the world is through the concept of theurgy.<sup>1127</sup> Theurgy is a Neoplatonic principle that offers a framework for conceiving of the interaction between divinity and created reality, which itself has certain ontological presuppositions which become important for Milbank’s conception of deification.

We can already conclude from the above positions that, for Milbank, God and the world are ontologically bound together from all eternity through the paradoxical figure of Sophia. Yet this relationship has been disturbed (as it is contradicted by our current mode of existence and explained through a metaphysical fall narrative) and must now be healed. Before outlining the nature of this ‘healing process,’ Milbank criticizes Church Fathers and theologians who have conceived of an ontology that would debar the type of ontological ‘reunion’ between God and the fallen world that Milbank wishes to uphold. He categorically rejects Gregory of Nyssa’s conception of ‘*epektasis*’ and positions which he believes are products of it, namely the Palamite distinction between God’s essence and his energies, and its more modern reformulation and adoption in Vladimir Lossky’s theology. In each case, these theologians wish to uphold the Creator/creature distinction even ‘after’ its eschatological redemption. Milbank remains cautious of such suggestions, as it would seem to forbid his attempt to account for a complete ontological reunion between God and the fallen creation, which was once paradoxically contained within a single unity. Thus, he suggests that:

To suppose that there is even a formal division between essence and energies risks two things: first of all, it risks supposing that deification is merely an irradiation by the light of the divine

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<sup>1127</sup> On the topic of Theurgy, see: Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, PSUP, 1995.

energies, lying in this sought of idolatrous ‘between,’ or false mediation, with the final divine darkness reserved. Secondly, it risks a contrasting of the divine darkness with the divine dazzling and overwhelming light, such that one is supposed, rather in the manner of Vladimir Lossky, once and for all to exceed the cataphatic, and as it were finally to access God in a sheerly negative mode by abandoning all images and their anticipations and plunging super-theoretically into the absolute night.<sup>1128</sup>

Milbank believes that, by attempting to uphold the divine difference, even within the creature’s deified union with God, would have ‘positivized the negative.’<sup>1129</sup> Milbank proposes that these positions were anticipated in ‘Gregory of Nyssa’s almost proto-Scotist view that God is most of all uncircumscribed positive infinity, to which there corresponds, on the part of finite spirits, an ‘endless epectasic progress.’<sup>1130</sup> In contrast to these positions, Milbank attempts to appeal to Pseudo-Dionysius and the Neoplatonist Iamblichus, whom he both believes to have laid greater stress on a deeper unity between God and creation. Thus he states:

He [Dionysius] more construed God as the coincidence of bounded and unbounded, with a corresponding stress that mystical access to God has supereminently to exceed *both* the cataphatic and the apophatic...In contrast to Gregory of Nyssa, this liturgical entering-in is not exceeded by an epectasic ‘desire to see’ which at once holds God at a slightly greater distance and also considers him ontologically in more absolutely negative terms. Instead Moses, by plunging into the night, is absolutely and finally united with the One in which finite and infinite coincide.<sup>1131</sup>

The purpose of theurgy is therefore to rediscover the creature’s ‘lost’ ontological congruence with the divine and to ‘solicit’ the response of divinity:

the liturgical magical procedure of theurgy, by achieving an attunement with the divine, allows us more to receive the ‘excellent gift of the gods’ and ‘the divine care which has been denied us’...Thus while prayer and invocation does not, indeed, change the minds of the gods, it is not simply a disguised mode of self-therapy because it permits us, through achieving the right topological, bodily and spiritual dispositions, to receive more fully the divine flow of grace.<sup>1132</sup>

The role of theurgy within Milbank’s Sophiology appears to be very close to the ‘recuperation’ narratives that we earlier identified within Russian Sophiology and Schelling’s ‘Philosophy of Mythology.’ In the former cases, the eschatological re-union of the lost divine principle or Sophia, was achieved by the teleological movement of history that stage by stage slowly

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<sup>1128</sup> Milbank, *Sophiology and Theurgy*, p.71.

<sup>1129</sup> *Ibid*, p.72.

<sup>1130</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>1131</sup> *Ibid*, pp.72-73.

<sup>1132</sup> *Ibid*, p.75.

‘prepared itself’ for the divine descent of the incarnation where the ‘re-union’ would be completed. Like Bulgakov before him, Milbank insists that Mary represents the highest point of Creation’s receptiveness to the divine, as the highest point of theurgic interaction. Therefore, Milbank echoes Bulgakov in upholding the necessity of Mariology for the realization of Christ’s incarnation; Mary becomes the requisite for the descent of the Logos:

Bulgakov acknowledged that Christ is only incarnate through the Church by means of the person of Mary, and only personally expressive in human time through the always already begun receptivity of the Church. In this way he faintly pointed to the radicalism of the surely logical view that the Bride is collectively and eschatologically the equal of the Bridegroom. Given his sexual ontology of the eminent ‘maleness’ of the Son-*Logos* and the eminent femaleness of the Spirit-*Donum* that is a crucial part of his vitalism and which I broadly endorse, this suggests also gender equality.<sup>1133</sup>

However, when viewed from the perspective of fallen Sophia’s teleological movement towards her eschatological re-union with the original monistic whole, the need for the ‘immaculate conception’ simply does not arise, as God through Sophia, and human history, has graciously been moving towards this point of the fittingness of creation to receive Christ in the incarnation:

Since the *fiat* is not merely the opening occasion for the Incarnation, but also relationally constitutive of the Incarnation, that Mary must already be the presence of the Church, yet as such must be from the outset of her life so composed that her orientation to the supernatural is also the beginning of the actual birth of the *Logos* within her.<sup>1134</sup>

Hence, this can only occur because of the fact that God is constantly becoming human:

The ascent of deification is impossible unless God constantly descends to us – meeting liturgically with our acts in time, which are our modes of being in time... We can become God, because God is constantly becoming us. Here again there cannot be mediation, yet there must be mediation in the sense of something that abides simultaneously on both sides of an absolute rift, held together by an ineffable attunement.<sup>1135</sup>

Once the fallen creation/Sophia has readied herself for the divine descent, the historical incarnation marks the ‘final finding and retrieving of the lost and fallen Sophia.’<sup>1136</sup> It is therefore not surprising that Milbank is forced to re-conceive the traditional Chalcedonian Christology of ‘two natures united hypostatically in one person’ simply because there is too much distinction between divinity and humanity in this schema, within which Milbank’s

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<sup>1133</sup> Ibid, p.83.

<sup>1134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1135</sup> Ibid, p.78.

<sup>1136</sup> Ibid, p.79.

conception of complete ontological identity cannot be realized. According to Milbank, a ‘hypostatic unity’ alone ‘suggests that he [Jesus] is in one aspect (the personal) the God-Man or incarnate, but in another aspect (the natural), he is not.’<sup>1137</sup> At this point, Milbank invokes the figure of Sophia as a mediatory principle between the person of Christ and his two natures in order to uphold a deeper unity between the two natures. Sophia is able to perform this role precisely because she is not ontologically distinct from God or creation, although fallen Sophia is separated from God in the mode of her existence; at base there is no ontological distinction between a human nature and a divine nature within Sophia:

The two characterizing powers are *at bottom one*, since the uncreated and created Sophia are more fundamentally one in ‘foundation and content’ according to Bulgakov – given that God is the all and the creation itself is ‘nothing but’ the outgoing of God, even though God is in himself mysteriously the self-exceeding. They differ only as to their ‘conditions’ of respectively of eternal glory and finite becoming and for this reason the two conditions can come together in the Incarnation not just actually on the basis of the one divine hypostasis, but also transcendently on the traditional basis of the more fundamental unity and tendency to unity of the two essences taken as the two Sophias or objective characterizing powers.<sup>1138</sup>

The incarnation therefore inaugurates the eschatological ‘recuperation’ of Sophia which can only be fully completed when absolute identity is restored. It appears that Milbank has had to modify an orthodox Chalcedonian Christology, to what – for all intents and purposes – is a *monophysite* Christology to account for this narrative. Although Milbank, like Bulgakov before him, still maintains the language of ‘two Sophias’ it appears clear that Sophia (God and the world) are *one*, simply *modally* distinguished in their respective states of being. However, as we have already pointed out in the previous chapter, a *modal* distinction does not appear to be enough to uphold the radical ontological difference between the Creator and the creation; especially when this modal distinction is *not* meant to be the case, but has rather occurred through the transcendental fall of Sophia, which is precisely what is to be negated in the Incarnation, where the monistic totality is resumed. Thus, Brandon Gallaher is surely correct in labeling Milbank’s Sophiological Christology ‘a strange form of monophysite Christology.’<sup>1139</sup>

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<sup>1137</sup> Ibid, p.80.

<sup>1138</sup> Ibid, p.81 (my emphasis).

<sup>1139</sup> Brandon Gallaher, ‘Graced Creatureliness: Ontological Tension in the Uncreated/Created Distinction in the Sophiologies of Solov’ev, Bulgakov and Milbank’, in *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 47:1-2, 2006, pp.163-190, p.179.

Therefore, having documented the recovery of the fallen Sophia, which has culminated in the incarnation of Christ, Milbank must now elucidate the effect this has on the rest of creation and the ‘future’ of the world within this dynamic.

Following Bulgakov and Schelling, Milbank suggests that the incarnation of Christ must necessarily presuppose the ‘involvement’ of the Trinity. If the Son, as substantive relationship, is incarnate in human history, then the Father and the Holy Spirit must also be, in some sense, ‘incarnate.’ In order to elucidate this point, Milbank divides history into three epochs each corresponding to one Person of the Trinity: the past, or Israel, is the time of the Father, the present the time of the Son, and the future the time of the Spirit and the Church:

The Father must in some fashion be ‘incarnated’ as the voice of human memory, especially as the memory of Israel? After all, if Christ is sinless, then this memory now becomes retrospectively perfected. By retrospection, the temporal source that is Israel becomes one with the eternal paternal source... And one can also say, with Bulgakov this time, that the Church in its eschatological totality is collectively personified by the Holy Spirit.<sup>1140</sup>

Therefore, the Church, as the epoch of the Spirit, is the gradual ‘growing into’ the identity between God and the world that Christ represents with the unity of the ‘two’ Sophias. According to Milbank, even matter is properly taken up into this relationship insofar as it has a certain kingship with the essence or Sophia of God, which Milbank suggests should be conceived as the ‘matter of God.’ ‘the play of the divine essence through the Trinitarian relations is therefore in a sense eminently matter, and this coincides with the sense that Sophia is eminently a female womb.’<sup>1141</sup> It is for this reason that Milbank contends that humanity is properly called a microcosm of the universe and the image of God, as opposed to angels and other spiritual beings for instance, as we possess this image only as spiritual/material beings.<sup>1142</sup>

Therefore, we have discussed Milbank’s theories of theurgy, Christology and deification in relation to his Sophiology. We noted its comparisons to Bulgakov’s concept of Wisdom. Milbank appeared to follow the general teleological movement of the fallen Sophia throughout history ascending towards God as God descends to creation, as outlined in Valentinian, Schellingian and Bulgakovian thought. Within the Christology of the biblical Wisdom tradition,

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<sup>1140</sup> Milbank, *Sophiology and Theurgy*, p.82.

<sup>1141</sup> *Ibid*, p.85.

<sup>1142</sup> Milbank here appears to be influenced by Merleau-Ponty’s suggestions that the material body is inherently relational.

we noted that Christ's humanity and divinity were always distinguished. Although Wisdom 'mediates' between God and the world (and this role was later ascribed to Christ) it also upholds ontological distinction. However, within the Valentinian Wisdom Christology, we noted a monophysite position, which maintained that fallen Sophia (humanity) and divine Sophia (Christ) are ultimately one and the same Sophia, this pattern was adopted by Bulgakov and is here seemingly taken on by Milbank. Furthermore, Milbank's vision of deification appears to be more closely indebted to the Gnostic Valentinian tradition than to that of the biblical one, for the reason that it follows the Valentinian narrative cycle of identity, fall, and recuperation.

### **Valentinian Wisdom, Biblical Wisdom and Milbank's Sophiology: A Comparative Outline**

As we have already noted above, Milbank's first purpose for producing a Sophiology was to provide a 'Trinitarian ontology' that was able to identify and subsequently account for a 'paradoxical' form of mediation within God's own mode of relating to God's 'self' which he could then utilize to ground the 'paradoxical' relationship between God and the world, which simultaneously upheld their mutual identity and their difference. By conceptualizing God's essence as the figure of Sophia, Milbank believed that he had succeeded in providing such a Trinitarian ontology. Milbank astutely identifies the Kantian 'problem of the comprehending other' in Bulgakov's Trinitarian Sophiology, and works hard to distance his positions from the conflict ridden theogonies apparent in Schelling, Hegel, and Russian Sophiology, that this dynamic can often invite. Whereas in Bulgakov's proposals, the 'comprehending other' was the second Person of the Trinity which turned out to be completely synonymous with the world itself, Milbank attempts to confine this 'process' exclusively to the immanent life of the Trinity, thus initially avoiding the pantheistic and monistic implications of Bulgakov's Sophiology. Therefore, *Being* must be manifested and comprehended by an *other* in order for it to *be* in any true sense. According to Milbank, the Father *is* by being comprehended by God's self as the Son, which occurs through the *act* itself which is accomplished in the Spirit. Here, 'otherness' inherently includes ontological compatibility and identity between that which is and that which comprehends, and furthermore even requires it. Sophia is the figure that embodies and expresses this relationship within Milbank's paradoxical Trinitarian ontology. Initially, Milbank's adjustments appear to have avoided the issue of monism and pantheism within Bulgakov's



Sophiology which prevent him from facing the ‘problem of finitude’ and the subsequent Gnostic narratives that seek to respond to this issue. However, Milbank still needs to account for creation’s participation within this Trinitarian ontology.

When attempting to identify the ‘place’ of creation within this Trinitarian ontology, Milbank notes that, due to the ubiquity of the Trinitarian ‘process’ itself, the creation must somehow reside within it, or alternatively, God goes outside God’s self when relating to his own existence, and this ‘movement’ is the reality of the world as such. In many respects, Milbank must reach this conclusion, for if a finite world could be accounted for ‘outside’ of God, then he would be simply supporting the theological narrative that he holds accountable for grounding the existence of ‘secularity,’ which is precisely what he is trying to undermine by insisting on the world’s essential place within his Trinitarian ontology. However, as we have seen, by adopting this method, Milbank inevitably implies a fundamental ontological monism, which threatens to collapse into a latent pantheism or ascosmism and, ironically, reinforce a radical form of atheistic secularity. In order to avoid both these positions, Milbank has to somehow paradoxically affirm both the identity of the world and God and their difference simultaneously. He does this by abandoning the principle of non-contradiction and affirming the paradoxical mediation achieved through the figure of Wisdom who is both divine and creaturely, thus upholding their unity within an ontological distinction by making the world an integral part of God’s self-comprehension. However, as we have seen above, rather than affirming difference within identity, Milbank’s notion of the infinite appears to simply confirm the monistic core of his ontology. This ideal ontological state of identity is then contradicted by the reality of finitude itself which is clearly not ontologically identical to God, where it supposedly ought to be. This reflexively introduces the Valentinian ‘problem of finitude’ which we have identified in chapter II, and traced throughout our chronology, to its presence in Milbank’s Sophiology. Now, Milbank is forced to embody a form of dialectical reasoning that he suggests is in fact paradoxical. However, either way, in both instances, God and the world are conceived to be in opposition to each other, an opposition which must be subsequently explained and then negated. As we have also seen in chapter II and in the respective narratives that have formed the core of this investigation, the ‘problem of finitude’ is addressed via a metaphysical fall narrative that explains *why* and *how* the world is apart from God, and this is precisely what we see in Milbank’s Sophiology. Sophia exercises a ‘blind will’ that results in her alienation from the

original and harmonious whole; resulting in the duplication of Sophia – ‘fallen Sophia’ or Achamoth, trapped in the finite world, and her heavenly counterpart the ideal of what her existence ought to be. This duplication should not be the case and must be dialectically negated to reinstall the harmony of the whole. Although Milbank attempts to avoid the overt Gnostic implications of his narrative by suggesting that Sophia’s fall is immediately resolved within God’s eternity, and therefore maintain that the creative act is independent of this conflict resolution within the divine, the facticity of the world’s history seems to undermine this attempt. For, it is precisely the historical finite world that needs to be readopted within the infinite whole, and this is exactly what Milbank attempts to achieve within his Christology and eschatology.

The fallen Sophia is constantly moving towards her re-inauguration with the monistic totality that she is currently separated from, and this process occurs through history itself. History is nothing more but the teleological drive to negate the consequences of the ontological alienation which have resulted from the fall. For Milbank, this occurs through ‘theurgy’ where human and divine interaction becomes attuned. Milbank, following Bulgakov, contends that the divine/human collaboration reaches its highest point in the figure of Mary where ‘her orientation to the supernatural is also the beginning of the actual birth of the *Logos* within her.’<sup>1143</sup> Mary represents the pinnacle of human history insofar as she embodies the ‘readiness’ for the fallen Sophia to receive her heavenly counterpart and negate the effects of the fall. Therefore, history is a divine/human movement, where the heavenly and the fallen Sophias are constantly seeking each other, until a complete union is possible. For Milbank, this union takes place in the Incarnation of Christ: ‘here alone occurs the event of the final finding and retrieving of the lost and fallen Sophia.’<sup>1144</sup> However, as we have already noted, Milbank envisages this union, not so much as an hypostatic communion of two ontologically distinct natures, but as an essential union between ‘two’ essences that are at base one: ‘the two characterizing powers are *at bottom one*, since the uncreated and created Sophia are more fundamentally one in ‘foundation and content.’<sup>1145</sup> However, if these two essences are already ontologically united and are identical, why must an incarnation occur at all within Milbank’s Sophiology? Even though the essences are identical, they are *modally* alienated from each other as a result of the fall, therefore Milbank’s

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<sup>1143</sup> Milbank, *Sophiology and Theurgy*, p.83.

<sup>1144</sup> *Ibid*, p.79.

<sup>1145</sup> *Ibid*, p.81 (my emphasis).

narrative requires a ‘re-union’ to take place, a recovery of something lost, the negation of the original negation of the totality, which completes the narrative. This is precisely why Milbank requires a monophysite Christology, and a doctrine of deification that excludes any possibility of ontological difference existing between God and creation, these must be in place in order to complete the narrative, to uphold the original monistic whole. After the incarnation, the Spirit draws the world into the communion of the Church and deifies creation resulting in its total participation in the totality.

Therefore, it should now be clear to what extent some aspects of Milbank’s Sophiology have clearly been informed by the concept of Wisdom produced within Valentinian Gnosticism which was outlined in chapter II. Although Milbank also borrows from the biblical concept of Wisdom, and we can see this most chiefly in his Trinitarian theology, which was outlined above. Furthermore, at points where the Valentinian concept of Sophia would appear to suggest itself in Milbank’s proposals, we attempted to unpack other possible discussions that could be said to underpin his proposals. For instance, in Milbank’s Christology, a Gnostic context did suggest itself, however, this theme was perhaps better understood against the background of Milbank’s commitment to transcendental knowledge (borrowed and elaborated on from de Lubac). However, despite this fact it is still the contention here that Milbank’s Sophiology remains more closely indebted to the Valentinian concept of Wisdom outlined in chapter II, for five predominant arguments:

- 1) Milbank’s Sophiology commences with an ontological monism of the infinite that is akin to the ‘founding Valentinian presupposition’ of Valentinian Gnosticism. This same position was generated in post-Kantian idealism, and embraced by Schelling, Solovyov, and Bulgakov, which appears to be the source of Milbank’s position.
- 2) This ontological monism is then contradicted by the reality of a finite world, that *should not be* insofar as it is ‘independent’ of the whole, this reflexively generates ‘the problem of finitude’ which was identified in chapter II, and was shown to be one of the regulative tenets of Valentinian mythology. This firstly requires that the current alienated state of finitude be explained: why is it the case when it ought not to be so? We have seen the problem of finitude emerge in Fichte’s Idealism, and then again in Schelling, Solovyov and Bulgakov, and now in Milbank himself.

- 3) The alienated state of finitude is explained by appealing to a metaphysical/transcendental fall, that is neither an historical fall or a narrative based on the Genesis myth. In this case, the fall involves an aspect of the divine alienating itself from its own existence. The Valentinian concept of Wisdom in distinction from its biblical counterpart, is always accompanied by this myth. As we have already noted, we identified this narrative structure in Schelling's theogony, which provided the apparatus for Solovyov and Bulgakov's own versions of the same narrative, only they both adopted the figure of Wisdom to express their positions. It is quite clear that Milbank adopts Sophia in almost an identical manner; to narrate a metaphysical fall that explains the alienated existence of finitude. However, we must note that in other areas of Milbank's theology he rejects this myth as outlined above.
- 4) Thus, having explained why and how the problem of finitude exists, and that it ought not to do so, Milbank must then attempt to negate this original negation in order to restore the original monism that has been disrupted by Sophia's fall. Therefore, within the Valentinian concept of Wisdom, God and the world are considered to be ontologically identical in their foundation or essence, but modally alienated from each other in their current existence. Thus, God and the world are conceived to be in opposition, when they ought not to be (the opposition between the fallen Sophia and the heavenly Sophia). Thus, this modal alienation must be negated, which occurs within the incarnation of Christ. According to Milbank's Sophiology, the incarnation marks the point at which the alienated Sophias are reunited modally. After all, they were never ontologically distinct in their foundation, only in their mode of existence, which is brought into mutual harmony in the being of Christ; the fallen Sophia and the heavenly Sophia reunited. Before this is able to take place, the fallen Sophia must teleologically prepare herself for this reunion through the 'process' of the world's history, we have identified this pattern in Schelling, Solovyov, and Bulgakov, and it now appears to be clearly apparent in Milbank's Sophiology. The doctrine of the 'incarnation' as the historical point where the reunion takes place marks the dissolution of the modal alienation, and the beginning of the recovery of the monistic whole. We have seen this in Schelling's *Philosophy of Revelation*, Solovyov's *Lectures on Divine-Humanity* and *Russia and the Universal Church*, Bulgakov's dogmatic trilogies, and now clearly in Milbank's own Sophiology,

all of which seem to be intimately informed by the concept of Wisdom apparent in Valentinian thought.

- 5) The eschatological portion of Valentinian wisdom theology always results in the dissolution of the duplicity of Sophia, and the re-absorption of the finite into the infinite whole. In the case of Schelling and Solovyov, this is what occurred, however, in the instances of Bulgakov and Milbank after him, the more conventional orthodox doctrine of deification was invoked. However, the basic outcome remains the same even here, what was once modally separated is now wholly unified without ontological distinction, which we have clearly identified in Milbank's Sophiological conception of deification.

Having critically discussed one aspect of modern British wisdom theology in John Milbank's Sophiology and discovered it to be more closely indebted to Valentinian Gnosticism, we shall now evaluate Paul Fiddes' wisdom theology and critically compare it to John Milbank's, seeing whether it perhaps offers an alternative that is more deeply rooted in the biblical concept of Wisdom.

### **Wisdom Theology in Paul Fiddes**

#### **Fiddes' Theology in Context**

Paul Stuart Fiddes (b.1947) is a leading British theologian and ordained minister within the Baptist tradition. Having received his initial education at Drayton Manor Grammar School in West London, in 1965 he attended St. Peter's College, Oxford to study philosophy, politics and economics. However, he soon changed his discipline to English language and literature and theology. He then subsequently studied for his doctorate, which he completed in 1976 entitled *The Hiddenness of Wisdom in the Old Testament and Later Judaism*. His most recent publication on Wisdom theology draws heavily on this dissertation. He then took up a post-doctoral research post at the Eberhard Karl's University of Tübingen, where he studied under Jürgen Moltmann and Eberhard Jüngel; both of whom would exert a great deal of influence over Fiddes' later theology. Fiddes has held a variety of academic positions throughout his professional career. From 1972-75 he was junior research fellow in Old Testament and Hebrew in Regent's college Oxford, where he later became tutor in Christian doctrine in 1975. In 1989 Fiddes was appointed principal of Regent's college and was later made Professor of Systematic Theology in Oxford in 2002. He is currently principal Emeritus at Regent's college. Fiddes has authored a wide range of

books and articles. Perhaps, his most significant publications would include *The Creative Suffering of God* (1988), *Past Event and Present Salvation: The Christian Idea of Atonement* (1989) (Keith Ward describes these as ‘modern classics’<sup>1146</sup>), *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (2000) and most recently, *Seeing the World and Knowing God: Hebrew Wisdom and Christian Doctrine in a Late-Modern Context* (2013).

The *Creative Suffering of God* is Fiddes’ most comprehensive attempt to defend and outline a doctrine of divine passibility. Drawing heavily on the 20<sup>th</sup> century German Protestant tradition (Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel) and process theology (sourced principally from the philosophical ideas of Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) who attempted to ontologize change by denying ontological reality to substance, which implied that God becomes with the world), Fiddes rejects the doctrine of God which he identifies as being classically theist; a God who is impassible; a God, which Fiddes argues, is detached and irrelevant to a finite world, especially a finite world that suffers such a myriad of evils. According to Fiddes, within classical theism, the world is unnecessary to God, insofar as God receives, ontologically speaking, nothing back from creation that would add to or change his existence. For Fiddes, God is ontologically bound up with the becoming of the world,<sup>1147</sup> God allows, and indeed desires the world to change God’s being. It is important to note that Fiddes is aware of how close these suggestions come to Hegelianism, yet is keen to distinguish his theological proposal from such positions by claiming that God *chooses* to limit himself, it is an act of God’s will to compassionately and patiently become with the world. Thus, becoming with the world is not an ontological necessity for God imposed upon him, but rather a freely determined act of God made out of his love for creation. This proposal is heavily indebted to Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel, all of whom adopt this same stance. This act of sacrificial love is revelatory of God’s Triune nature, in which God is eternally for the other. These themes of the volunteered mutability of God, the grounding of this act in God’s loving Triune nature, and the task of theology (liberal Protestant task) to make God relevant in the world, accompany Fiddes throughout his theological publications and indeed form an essential part of his later wisdom theology.

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<sup>1146</sup> Keith Ward, ‘Freedom, Necessity and suffering in God’, p.134.

<sup>1147</sup> Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992, p.65.

*Past Event and Present Salvation* again evidences Fiddes' commitment to interpreting Christian doctrine in a way that makes it intelligible within a modern context. Here, he is particularly keen to explore the significance of the 'past' event of Christ's passion and atonement for Christian believers in the present. Fiddes first proposes that if a doctrine of the atonement is to have any significant theological bearing, then the universal predicament of sin must be acknowledged. Fiddes suggests that three particular criteria of sin are universally applicable to humanity: estrangement, loss of potential and rebellion. Having provided ample evidence from history to support this contention, Fiddes then engages with the traditional images of atonement. Firstly, he addresses the notion of sacrifice. Here, Fiddes argues that Christ's unique sacrifice of himself provides the basis for a Christian Eucharistic sacrifice of praise and worship. He then evaluates the role of justice. At this point, Fiddes draws on his doctrine of divine suffering to note that the cross is the deepest expression of God's identification with human suffering and evil, which he perceives as an historical event shaping the intra-triune life of God. He then turns to the notion of victory, where the event of Christ's overcoming of death and hell on the cross provides the possibility for humanity to overcome its own tribulations, drawing strength from Christ's identification with our own sinful and suffering condition. Finally, Fiddes acknowledges the moral implication of this doctrine, suggesting that as we encounter love and forgiveness in Christ's passion and resurrection, we are called to participate in these events and allow Christ to shape the lives of others through our own responses to these experiences. Fiddes clearly builds on two significant themes from his earlier work on the *Creative Suffering of God*, namely the centrality of divine suffering and the evangelical call to proclaim the Gospel and Christian doctrine in a manner that is intelligible within a modern context.

One of the most significant features of *Participating in God* is the Trinitarian ontology that Fiddes outlines in this work, which will be a model utilized and expanded upon in his wisdom theology. When discussing the notion of Personhood within the Trinity, Fiddes is careful to distinguish its use in this context from modern emphases on the subject being an individual subjective center of consciousness. Instead, building on the Augustinian theme of 'subsistent relations,' Fiddes contends that the three Persons within the divine Trinity should be entirely understood as relations and not as persons having relationships. He claims:

Relations in God are real and 'beingful' as anything which is created or uncreated, and that there ground of existence is in themselves. If we use the term *hypostasis* as the fathers did for a

distinct reality which has being, then the relations are *hypostases*. There are no persons at the end of relation, but the persons are simply the relations.<sup>1148</sup>

Furthermore, Fiddes adopts the Barthian terminology of God as an ‘event’ and conceives of these triune subsistent relations as three movements of relationship within the event of God, which draws creation into this relational dynamic as active participator within the event of God. Creation can realize this through acts of prayer and worship, where the world actively communes with God from within the relationships that he is. Fiddes conceives that the ultimate invitation to this participation is within the incarnation, where Christ draws humanity into his relationship to the Father through the Spirit.

The three themes of divine mutability, mediation of Christian doctrine through contemporary culture, and a relational Trinitarian ontology play an important role in Fiddes’ most recent significant work: *Seeing the World and Knowing God*, where he proposes his wisdom theology at length, which we shall discuss in detail below.

Fiddes has an exceedingly wide range of influences on his theology. Fiddes maintains a keen interest in biblical scholarship which always effects his theological proposals. Furthermore, as already noted, Process theology plays a major role in his theological thinking. Theologians that have proven sympathetic to this strain of philosophy have also had an impact on Fiddes, most notably, Moltmann, Jüngel, and Barth. Fiddes has a broad breadth of interest in literature and modern philosophy and contemporary science. He is a theologian deeply engaged in the culture in which he inhabits. Thus, he engages with everything from postmodern philosophy (especially Derrida), to feminist thought (Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva), and contemporary quantum physics. Much of these influences will be discussed in the assessment of Fiddes’ wisdom theology which we shall now discuss.

## **The Concept of Wisdom in Seeing the World and Knowing God**

### **Why Wisdom?**

The theological purpose of *Seeing the World and Knowing God* is outlined by Fiddes in his introduction to the book, where he states: ‘my intention is to develop a wisdom-theology for the age in which we are living, connecting with the mood of our late-modern world, and drawing

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<sup>1148</sup> Paul Fiddes, ‘Participating in the Trinity’ p.381.



upon the wisdom literature of Ancient Israel, inter-testamental Judaism, and early Christianity.<sup>1149</sup> Fiddes' decision to embark on a wisdom-theology is by no means arbitrary; continuing to display his commitment to mediating Christian doctrine through modern culture, he believes that there is a major theme that relates biblical wisdom texts to the cultural climate of late-modernity, namely both search for 'wisdom' and 'have in common an interest in – perhaps even an anxiety about – the relation between the self and the world, as well as in the possibility of finding traces of an ultimate reality that transcends the self and yet is embodied in the interaction.'<sup>1150</sup> Therefore, contemporary thought evidences a struggle to relate the self to the world and vice versa and even doubts whether such a relation can exist, given that the very existence of the subject itself is rejected in many modern psychological and philosophical discourses. According to Fiddes, biblical wisdom theology struggled with this very same question, ultimately proposing a theological response that conceives of God and the world, the world and the subject as harmoniously united, however not without evidencing concerns over these themes that have been voiced in more recent times. It is this biblical proposal that Fiddes believes can offer something significant to the questions circulating in late-modernity, offering perhaps a different alternative to many of the current responses. In order for us to be able to assess Fiddes' wisdom theology, and especially how he utilizes the biblical concept of Wisdom outlined in chapter II, addressing similar issues that Milbank faced, we must first engage with Fiddes' reading of late-modernity – the discussion, from in which, he proposes his wisdom theology.

### **The Self and the World in a Late-Modern Context**

According to Fiddes, there were three forms of the 'self-world' relationship that were prevalent in modernity: 'three attempts to negotiate the relation of subject to object.'<sup>1151</sup> The first conceives the world as an object detached from the subject; the second perceives the world as an object that expresses the subject and in the third the world, as object, is considered a threat to the subject. Fiddes suggests that postmodernity can be characterized by its rejection of these three models.

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<sup>1149</sup> Paul Fiddes, *Seeing the World and Knowing God: Hebrew Wisdom and Christian Doctrine in a Late-Modern Context*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p.22.

<sup>1150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1151</sup> Ibid, p.29.

The first model of a self as detached and ultimate master of the world has its genesis in the thought of Descartes and Kant. Fiddes suggests that, in his search for epistemological certainty, Descartes was forced to abandon the world as represented by the mind as ultimately unreliable. Instead, he found certainty in the process of thinking itself. Ultimately, this radical turn to the self is given ‘formative expression in Descartes’ distinction between the *res cogitans* and the *res extensans*, a fundamental dualism between the cognitive self and its physical embodiment and environment.’<sup>1152</sup> This can result, and has, according to philosophers such as Hannah Arendt, in a distrust of the world and a total retreat into the subject.

In many respects, Kant continues to propagate this position when he subordinates reality to what can be known by a human subject. Thus the existence of the world is bound to the workings of human reason. Fiddes states that ‘Kant, we may say, contributes to a modern mindset in which the self is seen as being both detached from nature and the controller of physical nature.’<sup>1153</sup> This theme of subjective detachment from and mastery over the world is given theological expression in Schleiermacher’s category of ‘feeling’ as a form of knowing; and this is characterized by a feeling of absolute dependence; firstly, dependency on the world and then ultimately on God for the subject’s individual being. However, Fiddes argues that ‘despite dependence on the world, the result of this account of the subject is actually to extend the gap set up between subject and the world initiated by Descartes and continued by Kant. The world is not given attention in its own right, but only indirectly as the content of one’s own self-consciousness.’<sup>1154</sup>

Fiddes then explores the origins of his second model of the subject-object relationship existing within modernity: the self as an expression of the world. This form is developed to its greatest extent in the philosophy of Hegel. Fiddes remarks that: ‘with Hegel we do...take the step of conceiving God as absolute mind coming to self-consciousness through relation to the world;’<sup>1155</sup> which has implications for human subjectivity: ‘the idealist account of the universe means that an interior subjectivity is necessarily integrated into external objectivity of physical, cultural, and

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<sup>1152</sup> Ibid, p.31.

<sup>1153</sup> Ibid, p.33.

<sup>1154</sup> Ibid, p.34.

<sup>1155</sup> Ibid, p.36.

social contexts.’<sup>1156</sup> Fiddes notes the theological significance of Hegelian philosophy, suggesting that it dealt the first major blow to divine immutability by conceiving of God as kenotic self-emptying into the other of the world whilst maintaining distinction within unity from the created order. Yet most importantly, Hegel appears to have overcome the divide between subject and object. However, rehearsing the classic theological critique of Hegel, first outlined by Schelling (as outlined in chapter IV), and which has proven so influential in the contemporary reception of Hegel, Fiddes argues that ‘the objectivity of the world is nothing other than an expression of the subject, of a mind which is self-aware. It is doubtful then whether the world and even other persons are really ‘alien’ and ‘strange’ to the journeying mind at all. ‘Others’ are seen to be simply ‘more of the same.’<sup>1157</sup>

Lastly, Fiddes outlines his third model: the world as a threat to the self. Jean-Paul Satre is taken as the exemplar of this approach. Fiddes suggests that Satre argues that the self is a project created by individual choice as an exercise of freedom (being-in-itself). However, the objectivity of the world is perceived as a boundary to the exercise of freedom, thus creating an absurd contradiction, in which the subject must simply choose to be. Satre then suggests that the subject is also a ‘being-for-others’ in which he argues that the subject depends on other subjects for its own constitution: ‘we are at the mercy of others insofar as their consciousness of our self effectively determines our being.’<sup>1158</sup> Therefore, the objectivity of the subject’s surroundings is necessary to the development of the subject, but is equally seen as a limiting and threatening presence to the individual. Therefore the three main models of the subject-object relationship developed within modernity fail to unite and harmonize subject and object despite a desire to. This legacy is inherited by postmodernity, which prompts several reactionary responses which Fiddes characterizes in four modes: immersion in the world, a hermeneutic of suspicion, openness of meaning, and the impact of the sublime. It is important to note that Fiddes, unlike Milbank, does not wish to challenge the foundations of postmodernity, nor categorize it as a series of theological confusions and failures, but, rather accepts its legitimacy as a late-modern paradigm of thought and attempt to tease out commonalities between this paradigm and a theology that draws substantially on the Jewish-Christian wisdom tradition.

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<sup>1156</sup> Ibid, p.36.

<sup>1157</sup> Ibid, p.37.

<sup>1158</sup> Ibid, p.39.

Now turning to the first postmodern model of subject-object relations: immersion in the world; for Fiddes, this is epitomized within the tradition of phenomenology, specifically in the thought of Edmund Husserl. According to the latter, there is no subjective encounter with the objectivity of the world that is not already bound up with the manner (including hopes, desires and so forth) in which the subject engages with the world; Husserl calls this ‘intentionality’. Therefore: ‘the attitude taken towards the object is inseparable from it, so that consciousness is always ‘consciousness of,’ and the object is always ‘perceived as.’<sup>1159</sup> Building on this phenomenological insight, Levinas states the case even more strongly, noting that ‘there is no objectivity that would be indifferent to the very existence of a subjectivity.’<sup>1160</sup> Before Levinas, Heidegger had also categorized the self as that which is comprised of its *Befindlichkeit*.

Fiddes is influenced by this phenomenological model of the subject-object relation, to the extent that his wisdom theology will seek to affirm that there is no gap between the ‘observing mind of the wise and the observed world; moreover there is no gap to ‘mind’ between God and the world, no ontological abyss that has to be bridged for God to be present and active in the world.’<sup>1161</sup> Despite these sympathies, Fiddes remains non-committal to a total assimilation of this view point, arguing that this approach, taken to its logical conclusion, could ‘reduce the reality of the world to the consciousness itself, or at least subordinate it.’<sup>1162</sup> Husserl ‘brackets’ out the ontological question of the actual existence of the phenomena intentionally perceived by the subject, to focus entirely on the ‘intentional object’; Fiddes shares Derrida’s concerns that this could result in a transcendental ego utterly detached from the world – affirming a radical form of idealism. However, on the opposite end of the spectrum, it is just as possible, within the phenomenological proposal, to conceive of the self as ‘de-centered construct within the system of signs which constitutes corporate life.’<sup>1163</sup> A self entirely produced by its shifting and non-substantial environment; a self that doesn’t really exist. Fiddes suggests that this position is represented by Foucault, but is not shared by thinkers such as Levinas, Derrida, and Kristeva. Therefore, Fiddes accepts certain crucial insights from this proposal of ‘immersion in the world,’

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<sup>1159</sup> Ibid, p.41.

<sup>1160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1162</sup> Ibid, p.42.

<sup>1163</sup> Ibid.

yet rejects its extreme variations. He accepts the late-modern contention that the self is necessarily bound up with the world.

Fiddes then explores the second characteristic of late-modern thought: a hermeneutic of suspicion. He suggests that the philosophical foundations of this mood are rooted in Nietzsche, whose astute and radical suspicions of universal moral values and thought-forms were heavily criticized for concealing the interests of certain social groups, in dynamic power games, designed to promote individual interest as universal value. More recently, Fiddes proposes that Lyotard has adopted this Nietzschean theme contending that ‘grand-narratives are nothing other than a self-presentation of the subject that develops them, and represent the desire to dominate others.’<sup>1164</sup> Although Fiddes accepts that some meta-narratives can indeed be abusive and self-interested projections, he argues with David Bentley Hart that particular narratives, such as Nazism, can only be judged as morally unacceptable from the vantage point of a meta-narrative. Christianity itself must presuppose a metanarrative and a metaphysics to the extent that it proposes a ‘comprehensive, conceptual account of reality which exceeds a merely empirical analysis of the physical world.’<sup>1165</sup> This metaphysics is rooted in a Trinitarian ontology for Fiddes, which we shall see later. The main challenge to any theological metanarrative, including the wisdom narrative that Fiddes will propose, is to ‘present a metanarrative in a way that the hearer will be convinced is not dominating, abusive of local narratives, or a rhetoric of power projected by the corporate ‘self’ of the Christian institution.’<sup>1166</sup>

Fiddes’ third category is ‘the openness of meaning.’ This mood emerges as a critical response to the structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure and is commonly referred to as poststructuralism. For Saussure ‘the meaning of words and phrases comes from their relation to each other, and particularly their difference from each other.’<sup>1167</sup> Saussure imagined the written text to be a contained world in which meaning could be construed only by studying it as an interrelated network of signs. Derrida extends this contention, pointing out that the extension of difference between signs can be infinite as all signs always differ from each other. Therefore, archetypal meaning is always deferred and postponed. Derrida calls this *différance*. Due to the fact that

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<sup>1164</sup> Ibid, p.45.

<sup>1165</sup> Ibid, p.47.

<sup>1166</sup> Ibid, p.48.

<sup>1167</sup> Ibid, p.48.

structuralism searches for an overall meaning within a text implied by the signs adhering there in, Derrida undermines this approach to the extent that no meaning can ever be captured within the infinite extension of deferment. Derrida's approach not only challenged structuralism, but all metanarratives built on the foundation of a 'transcendental signifier' such as God, reason and the Oedipus complex. Some have taken Derrida's position to imply an ultimate nihilism, which Fiddes is keen to reject. However, he does accept that there can be no totalizing reading of a particular text in which one permitted reading is upheld. According to Fiddes, the Jewish-Christian wisdom tradition, like Derrida, undermines such a proposal; arguing instead for a rich diversity of different meanings in a particular text. Thus, there is a meeting point on this issue: 'I intend to argue that there is a commonality between the hermeneutics of a sacred text and *all* texts, but even a Christian approach to Scripture which is sophianic...shows that there is a basic sympathy with postmodern insights into openness of meaning.'<sup>1168</sup>

The final category that Fiddes explores is the 'challenge of the sublime.' Kant is the first philosopher to draw a clear distinction between what is beautiful and what is sublime. Beauty is agreeable insofar as the understanding and imagination are harmonized, whereas the sublime represents a conflict between reason and imagination, which is excited when the subject is faced with the immeasurable or the awe inspiring (the multitudes of stars in the night sky or of the vast expanse of an ocean). On such occasions, the imagination cannot fathom that which it looks upon, which causes it distress at its own limitations, however simultaneously, reason believes that such events should be fathomable, which draws attention to humanity's intellectual capacity to transcend the purely sensible and provokes a sense of negative pleasure. This ought, produced by reason, bares clear resemblances to the categorical imperative, which is also an experience of the sublime revealing humanity's ultimate freedom over the objective world. According to Fiddes, postmodern thought adopts a notion of the sublime that runs contrary to Kant's own understanding; experiencing the sublime as a destructive theme; the experience of nothingness undermining all positive representation and objective reason. Such themes are epitomized by Lyotard, Deleuze and Derrida in Fiddes' view. However, while some theologians have attempted to combat this reading of the sublime, Fiddes suggests that 'the sublime offers common ground

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<sup>1168</sup> Ibid, p.52.

for theology and thinkers of the late-modern world to explore a sense of transcendence.<sup>1169</sup> The postmodern sublime offers theology a way of ‘liberating’ the transcendence of God by demonstrating that God cannot be enclosed with any particular system, but interrupts such systems and requires an ongoing plurality of discourses to do justice to this transcendence.

What we have briefly outlined above is the primary context in which Fiddes will seek to construct his wisdom theology, in which he will be attempting to provide a theological model, that takes account of these four moods of late-modernity, of the self-world relationship, drawn from the biblical wisdom tradition.

### **Wisdom and the Concept of the Self**

Building on his earlier analysis of ‘immersion in the world,’ Fiddes contends that the ‘destruction of the self’ in postmodernity, whilst being supported by thinkers such as Deleuze, is not endorsed by Derrida. Although Derrida certainly dismisses the subject as a stable center of identity, he does not give up the idea completely; thus, Fiddes adopts Derrida as a partner in dialogue as he seeks to propose a theological understanding of the self that resists its modern representation and which is ultimately grounded in the wisdom tradition. To construct this self-Fiddes visits the Hebraic wisdom text of Job and especially this text as read by Levinas and Ricoeur. According to Fiddes, one of the key themes to emerge out of the book of Job is Job’s sense of persecution and accusation, by his friends and ultimately by God himself. Levinas adopts this theme to argue that the subject is in existence only insofar as it is called into being through ethical responsibility to the other. ‘The origin of the free subject lies in responsibility to the other who is infinitely different to the self, making a demand which is always prevenient, overturning all structures of being and totality with a force like the sublime...what Job portrays as the accusation of the divine Other...is in fact the demand upon us of all others in the world.’<sup>1170</sup> Therefore, Levinas’ reading of Job proposes a self that is immersed in the other, to the extent that it *is* only insofar as it is for the other; to the extent that its free subjectivity has been summoned forth through responsibility to the divine Other.

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<sup>1169</sup> Ibid, p.56.

<sup>1170</sup> Ibid, p.72.

Similarly, Ricoeur advocates a parallel version of the subject to that proposed by Levinas, stating that the subject is not a Cartesian static substance, but a fluctuating reality produced by its engagement with its world through narrative and history; as these change, so does the subject. According to Fiddes, ‘as Ricoeur develops it; fundamental to the reflexiveness of the subject is knowing oneself by way of the other...Ricoeur thus finds a different picture of the self from the ‘little island’ of an isolated cogito. With its story-like quality, the *ipse* comes to a mediated self-awareness through powerful symbols in culture...and through relation with the other.’<sup>1171</sup> Fiddes thus concludes, with the mood of late-modernity, loosely supported by biblical references to Job, that the subject must be perceived as constructed through immersion in the otherness of the world:

I will be using the words subject and self basically in Ricoeur’s sense. The subject...is a self...only in the Ricoeurian sense of oneself...that is a subject with a narrative history, always mediated to itself through reflection on signs, symbols, other persons, and objects in the world. With Ricoeur...Derrida, Levinas, and other late-modern thinkers...I maintain that a stable and self sufficient self which can be observed empirically by the subject is an illusion.<sup>1172</sup>

It is this conception of the self that will be the corner stone of Fiddes’ wisdom theology: ‘in making a wisdom theology for today, I shall be exploring the way that the self participates in the divine Other through immersion into the contingent details of the world.’<sup>1173</sup> Participation in the divine (a key aspect of Fiddes’ wisdom theology), which is akin to responsibility to finite others, occurs most vividly when the self is conceived through the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, as we shall see shortly.

Fiddes’ conception of the self is greatly indebted to postmodern thought on subjectivity. That being said, Wisdom was discovered – within chapter I of this thesis – to be neither pure object nor pure subject, but rather a personification; something approaching the personal, as well as being a description of an objective reality. Fiddes appears to borrow as much from the biblical concept of Wisdom as he does from recent philosophy when constructing his notion of the self. Furthermore, within the Valentinian concept of Wisdom, a stable divine core was proposed that inhered within certain humans, giving rise to a fixed subjectivity. Such a conception of the self is neither found in Fiddes’ proposals or in Milbank’s.

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<sup>1171</sup> Ibid, p.79.

<sup>1172</sup> Ibid, p.82.

<sup>1173</sup> Ibid, p.83.



## Wisdom and the Concept of the World

Having proposed his understanding of the self, Fiddes now turns his attention to constructing an image of the world that is in sync with the mood of late-modernity. Following the insights of Hannah Arendt, Fiddes notes that the subject conceived in modernity as master over objectivity has resulted in a feeling of alienation from the world. The world is perceived as a threat to the subject, its diversity and complexity is overwhelming, and in a bid to keep this at bay, modernity retreated into the security of the mind to exercise control over the world. ‘The earth-world has been badly upset by alienation, so that humankind has lost a sense of being at home within it.’<sup>1174</sup> According to Fiddes, Arendt offers an image of the world that could be taken up within his wisdom theology due to its similarities to ancient wisdom texts; Arendt:

alerts us to the context of late-modern thought which finds the world to be full of contingent things which...elude investigation by the rational mind when it is thought to reign supreme in the world. If the human self tries to control or dominate the earth, then the earth’s natural self-concealment and resistance to investigation will be accentuated. Her sense of the elusiveness of the world has remarkable resonances with the outlook of ancient wisdom.<sup>1175</sup>

Fiddes reads the ‘sentence literature’ of *Proverbs* as simultaneously affirming that while the world is something which can be investigated, understood and passed down through tradition by the wise, it also admits a ‘limit of understanding. “Three things are too wonderful for me, four I do not understand.” The wise then are aware of the incalculabilities that arise out of the very material they are dealing with.’<sup>1176</sup> The world is both open and inexhaustible.

Within the book of *Proverbs*, God or Yahweh, as Fiddes points out, is often evoked when human wisdom reaches its limit, when transcendence must be acknowledged, due to the vast expanse of the world that cannot be fully grasped. Fiddes is aware that this could simply be a crude positing of the God of the gaps, however he argues that there is more to it than that. ‘Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied and human eyes are never satisfied’ (Prov 27:20). The world is ever elusive and the human thirst for discovery is never exhausted. The sheer overwhelming expanse and hiddenness of the world conjures up humility at this limitation, a humility that is phrased as a humility before God within *Proverbs*. God is posited as one that can see everything,

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<sup>1174</sup> Ibid, p.93.

<sup>1175</sup> Ibid, p.96.

<sup>1176</sup> Ibid, p.98.

God's wisdom encompasses the world in a manner that humanity's cannot. Fiddes summarizes this point:

We have found that the limitation of the wisdom method arises out of the very material which wisdom concerns itself with, so we can picture the limit not as a boundary beyond which God resides, but as a boundlessness of the human personality and the natural world. Wisdom is limited by the scope of the material – its diversity, multiplicity, and complexity that can never be fully grasped by human minds. The transcendence of God...does not consist in God's dwelling beyond a boundary located between two spheres of reality; rather, God is at home in the boundless expanse of the world in a way that we are not.<sup>1177</sup>

Fiddes then goes on to outline this unique approach of biblical wisdom as opposed to that which is found in Egyptian parallels, he also finds further confirmation of this approach in the rest of the literature of *Proverbs*. Fiddes borrows Arendt's contention that the world is inexhaustibly complex and, when faced with this limit, the subject views the world as a hostile place which results in its alienation from the latter. Fiddes finds this same inexhaustibility of the world in the biblical wisdom book of *Proverbs*, however here, his is matched with a humility before God who marks this transcendent limit of human knowledge and also provides a telos for the insatiable human thirst for knowledge that ends in communion with God and also with the world, which is no longer seen as a hostile threat to the subject.

Fiddes continues to explore the theme of the complexity of the world in the wisdom literature and in late-modernity, here focusing on modern scientific discourses. Although postmodernity has remained markedly suspicious of scientific discourses (due to its tendencies to impose metanarratives), Fiddes suggests the contemporary science has much to offer a wisdom theology for today: 'theology can hardly talk about the world in our age without at least attempting to connect with the way that science sees the world, since this is such a shaping force in our culture.'<sup>1178</sup> According to Fiddes, science offers a parallel reading of the world to that offered in the ancient wisdom texts, namely that the world can be investigated but such an investigation will inevitably come up against limitations due to the complexity of the cosmos. He highlights a variety of different ways that modern science affirms the complexity of the world, the first being complexity arising from elusive conditions. This can occur on both the macroscopic and microscopic levels. In both instances science affirms that complexity arises from the lack of

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<sup>1177</sup> Ibid, p.110.

<sup>1178</sup> Ibid, p.131.

clarity surrounding initial causes of given phenomena in the world. Thus, Fiddes offers the example of the phenomenon of a hurricane, potentially being traced back to an event of apparently little significance, like a butterfly flapping its wings. Chaotic events on the macroscopic level only *appear* to be indeterminate. On the microscopic level, Fiddes offers the examples from human biology: ‘heart fibrillation and epileptic fits, which appear random, can be seen as the reaction of sensitive systems – whether the body’s mechanical pump or its electrical circuits – to tiny initial disturbances.’<sup>1179</sup> Thus, complexity is a product of initial causes being hidden or masked from the investigator.

A second type of complexity in the world, which Fiddes considers, is a legitimate notion of uncertainty and indeterminacy. He refers to the quantum world, where sub-atomic particles obey no clear pre-described rules: ‘the motion of an electron has a wave function which has the potential either for position or momentum, but not both simultaneously. It is a world in which possibilities are no less real than actualities.’<sup>1180</sup>

The third mode of the world’s complexity is labelled by Fiddes as complexity arising from interaction. This can be understood to affirm that the interaction of existences (in every sense) produces unexpected outcomes and different levels of complexity. Fiddes again takes an example from quantum physics: ‘it seems that in some way the act of measuring, and so the intervention of consciousness, contributes to the nature of the particle which before this exists in a potential state.’<sup>1181</sup> Fiddes’ fourth scientific model of complexity is essentially an extension of the third, complexity arising out of different possibilities, like that which we just saw in the example taken from quantum physics.

According to Fiddes, contemporary science discovers the complexity of the world to be an awakening to human epistemological limitation, in a very similar manner to the way in which the ancient wisdom tradition confirmed. It is within this framework of the complexity of the world that Fiddes will produce his complex model of the triune God. Although Fiddes’ entire approach to wisdom theology, engaging with the culture within which it is situated – not only its own – but sometimes quite diverging cultures – bears witness to the concept of biblical Wisdom outlined in

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<sup>1179</sup> Ibid, p.133.

<sup>1180</sup> Ibid, p.134.

<sup>1181</sup> Ibid, p.137.

chapter I; here, where Wisdom is so willing borrowed from its cultural surroundings in order to communicate itself to the world and indeed to its own community, provides clear evidence of this biblical continuity (especially in Fiddes' discussion of the scientific construction of the world and how this has impacted on his concept of God). This style is in stark contrast to the Gnostic wisdom theology outlined in chapter II, where Wisdom was accessed by a privilege few and was enlightening rather than learning from cultures around itself. Fiddes' commitment to the biblical ethos of the wisdom tradition can be contrasted to Milbank's approach within his Sophiology. To take just one comparison, note how in the above rendition of Milbank's suggestions, he willing imposes the notion of paradox in order to affirm his ontological conclusion, that is extracted from contemporary epistemological categories accepted by wider communities outside of the theological world. Whilst this is certainly not a quirk of Gnosticism, it is clearly distinct from the biblical wisdom ethos embodied by Fiddes at this point.

### **Wisdom and the Concept of God: Complex Trinity**

Fiddes sees this modern scientific insight of the complexity of the world affirmed within modern linguistics; especially within the philosophy of Derrida, where the world is perceived as a relation of complex signs within language that perpetually point beyond themselves. Fiddes suggests that Wisdom continually transgresses 'the distinctions between subject and object, and in itself expresses the immersion of the self into the world.'<sup>1182</sup> It is therefore within the complexity of the world revealed by modern science and linguistics that 'talk about God becomes appropriate.'<sup>1183</sup> The wisdom literature reveals that God possesses Wisdom from all eternity. And, according to Fiddes: 'if this affirmation is to have any power of analogy with what human beings know as wisdom, God must be always committed to the signs of the material world, always involved in its text as God's context...Indeed God must be deeply immersed in the time and history in which signs exist.'<sup>1184</sup> It is this very conviction that prompts Fiddes to revisit arguments outlined in his *Creative Suffering of God*, where he rejects the notion of an immutably simple God found in traditional theism. Fiddes is adamant that his wisdom theology must propose a God who is complex and related to the world, if God is to have any meaning in a late-modern context. Fiddes is aware that in order for God to be God, and not just another finite

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<sup>1182</sup> Ibid, p.147

<sup>1183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1184</sup> Ibid.

thing. It must be maintained philosophically that God is both pure act and self-existent. However, he does not believe that this necessarily entails that God cannot be internally complex whereby: 'such complexity would allow us to conceive of God as exhibiting infinity, not in excluding the finite, but including it as part of the divine being.'<sup>1185</sup> Furthermore, following Barth, Fiddes argues that a voluntaristic conception of God, as one who freely chooses what God is to be, does not debar aseity. After all, God could simply choose to be affected by the world and this would not compromise his divinity, for Fiddes.

Fiddes is here working from within a foundational theological prejudice (if it may be labelled as such) that believes that 'traditional' affirmations of divine simplicity exclude 'interaction' with the finite world and posit a God who is above and beyond the world in a way that renders God superfluous. In order to rectify this theological failure, it is the task of modern theologians to relate God to the world by challenging the premises of traditional theism, justifying this approach by claiming that is a more truthful rendition of biblical narrative and revelation. Fiddes is mindful of the theological implications of such an approach, attempting to avoid transforming God into another finite thing. However, with what success Fiddes achieves this must be considered questionable. Firstly, the presupposition that traditional theistic conceptions of God as simple being, render God unrelated to a complex finite world have been challenged, most famously by Herbert McCabe. According to McCabe, God's 'ability' to relate to the world should not be founded on a shared property of complexity (however distinguished these two types of complexity are proposed to be) as this would inevitably imply that God relates to the world in a limited and constrained manner as other finite things relate to the world. In McCabe's logic, it is precisely because God is simple (not complex like finite beings) that God can relate to the world as God, in an unlimited and unconstrained way: 'if the creator is the reason for everything that is, there can be no actual being which does not have the creator as its center holding it in being. In our compassion we, in our feeble way, are seeking to be what God is all the time: united with and within the life of our friend.'<sup>1186</sup> Furthermore, the argument that God chooses to relate to the world as another finite thing would appear to bear little theological relevance in light of the previous argument. For even if it be granted that it is not a challenge to the God which is pure act that he could choose to be in a manner that is consistent with finite

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<sup>1185</sup> Ibid, p.148.

<sup>1186</sup> Herbert McCabe, *God Matters*, London, Continuum, 2005, pp.44-45.

being (which is perhaps philosophically and logically questionable), it simply appears unnecessary, given that God already relates to the world, *in his simplicity*, in the most intimate form by which nothing could be gained by relating to the world as another finite thing. The purpose of Fiddes' argument appears to be aimed at ensuring that there is a place for a complex world within the divine being, yet this seems to be already accounted for within a 'traditional' doctrine of divine simplicity, which as McCabe elegantly expounds, is already inherent within the biblical narrative of creation.<sup>1187</sup> Fiddes' commitment to a complex God moving and developing with history appears similar to the model of God's interaction with the world outlined in Valentinian wisdom theology in the second chapter. Both appear to be somewhat mythological in nature. Although Fiddes is clearly more careful to guard against the type of myths inherent in Gnosticism, it seems difficult to deny that there is a mythical quality to a God changing and developing within history. Furthermore, the concreteness of the historical incarnation of Christ could be challenged within Fiddes' complex God ontology, as God is already, in a sense, a part of history. His incarnation then has already and is continually occurring. This is also another feature of Gnostic theology, although Fiddes is eager to maintain a unique incarnation.

It was earlier argued that Milbank fell into a similar narrative pattern, however this was not because he maintained a concept of God that was incongruent to traditional theism, but rather because he was unable to distinguish the creaturely Sophia from the divine Sophia.

Within the biblical concept of Wisdom God is transcendent in his immanence to creation and is immanent to creation precisely because he relates to the world as simple transcendent divinity. By abiding to this insight, the mythical elements of Gnostic thought can be avoided. Furthermore, the historical incarnation of Christ can be more radically affirmed within such a conception of God, given the fact that God is not excluded from the world in his simplicity. He can relate to the world in Christ precisely without giving up his divinity. In Fiddes' system, one appears to have to uphold that God (in the traditionally theistic sense) cannot be incarnate as he is but must change. However, to affirm this point is to seemingly deny the historical incarnation. However, if it is only the concept of God that must be changed and God then becomes a complex

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<sup>1187</sup> Oliver Davies offers a highly sophisticated and harmonious portrayal of Christian theology and doctrine which takes genuine consideration of modern science and philosophy, in a way that is sensitive to the significance of classical Christian understandings of God's existence. See: Oliver Davies, *Theology of Transformation: Faith Freedom and the Christian Act*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.

being that is then able to relate to the world, seems only to further deny the reality of the incarnation, as the fact that another complex finite thing can relate to another of its own kind does not seem to encapture the miracle of the incarnation.

Fiddes' Trinitarian theology, the cornerstone of his wisdom theology, is directly related to his understanding of a complex God. Within his Trinitarian thought, Fiddes makes use of the traditional language of *hypostases* affirming that this category must be entirely subsumed under the notion of relation: 'I urge that *hypostases* (which are not distinct beings) should not even be understood as subjects or agents, but as relations which are as real as any subjects who *have* relations.'<sup>1188</sup> He uses the patristic term *perichoresis* to indicate the nature of the inter-penetration of the relations.

For Fiddes, 'talk about God as Trinity begins from encounter with God in the world.'<sup>1189</sup> It is only possible to experience the triune relations through the complex relations existing within the world: 'we can only experience divine relations in and through the multiple relations we find in the world, whether human or in the wider scene of nature.'<sup>1190</sup> Fiddes argues that the complexity of the world is a direct product of the complexity of the triune relations of difference cohering in love in God. From a world in which chance exists and uncertainty (according to quantum theory), it can be inferred that God is willing to patiently bear with creation as it grows and develops with God. The world is not coerced by divine power, but attracted by divine love: 'if we think of this from the perspective of God as Trinity, we can say that in creation God makes room for created beings to indwell the fellowship of divine life, and that in redemption God draws them ever more deeply into God's own communion of relationships.'<sup>1191</sup>

### **The Concept of Wisdom in Fiddes' Thought**

Fiddes remarks that 'seeing' has been one of the most prevalent images of the human and divine subject. However, drawing on scholarship from Derrida, he affirms that it has also been one of the most oppressive images of subjectivity; one that is characterized by its capacity to control. In relation to the biblical figure of Wisdom, Fiddes notes that at first glance Wisdom is presented:

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<sup>1188</sup> Fiddes, *Seeing the World and Knowing God*, p.150.

<sup>1189</sup> *Ibid*, p.153.

<sup>1190</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>1191</sup> *Ibid*, p.162.

‘as a female figure who is active on a cosmic scene and who makes herself available to human beings; significantly, she is also some kind of supreme observer of the world.’<sup>1192</sup> Fiddes quotes Prov 8:22 and Sir 24:1-22 in support of this observation. Fiddes further notes that scholars such as Bultmann have attempted to deduce an original Gnostic or oriental myth (a fallen Wisdom searching for a home on earth) that has been adapted within the Jewish tradition and has produced texts such as Prov 8. However, Fiddes elucidates much of the scholarship that was discussed in the first chapter of this thesis to conclude that, whilst there are similarities, there is no substantial evidence to support that the Hebraic figure of Wisdom is a product of such mythology. Fiddes concludes that Lady Wisdom is a personification of Yahweh’s wisdom, with the added addition that the movement of Wisdom across the world mimics the movement of the sun. Fiddes states: ‘in terms of the poetic form of Proverbs 8 there seems then no reason to deny that Lady Wisdom appears here as a personified attribute of God. She is indeed the way that God deals with the world. Fiddes then disputes that the Wisdom myth is at play in Ben Sira, opting instead to concur with the analysis in chapter I of this thesis that, within Sirach, Wisdom becomes historically present within the Jewish culture and community: ‘dwelling in Jerusalem is a metaphor for becoming even more accessible to readers of the Torah.’<sup>1193</sup> The figure of Wisdom is further developed in the *Wisdom of Solomon*, where Wisdom takes on the creative capacity of God and has a special relationship with humanity (as seen from the exegesis in chapter I), Fiddes notes that: ‘Wisdom shares in the generous creativity of God, giving rise to endless delights of diversity. She does not offer a flight from the many to the alone, but a journey into the manifold aspects of the world which she knows intimately, both because she surveys them and because she pervades them.’<sup>1194</sup> In conclusion Fiddes states that:

In the face of the endlessness and elusiveness of the world, the personification of wisdom is a way of inviting human beings into a personal relationship with a wisdom which is both divine and human...living in tune with wisdom will enable the wise person to enter into the phenomena of the world, and – although there is no possibility of mastering it entirely – to live with it and flourish within it.<sup>1195</sup>

Thus seeing the world through wisdom is to participate in God’s own wisdom. It is simultaneously a human and divine activity: seeing the world in wisdom is akin to knowing God:

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<sup>1192</sup> Ibid, p.175.

<sup>1193</sup> Ibid, p.197.

<sup>1194</sup> Ibid, p.202.

<sup>1195</sup> Ibid, p.203.



‘observing the world cannot be separated from knowing God. Seeing the world, the viewing self finds itself being drawn into a communion of life with wisdom, and so shares in a divine movement of seeing.’<sup>1196</sup> In order to affirm this position Fiddes must again take issue with scholastic theology, as Aquinas in particular maintained (according to Fiddes) that seeing the world with God can only be an eschatological hope, in which it is a supremely intellectual participation:

Direct participation of the created in the uncreated remains for Aquinas only an eschatological hope, and this itself is a distinctly intellectual vision, depending on a view of the mind as the aspect of humanity that most resembles God. Moreover, this is an account which unfortunately, hardly requires a Trinitarian theology.<sup>1197</sup>

Fiddes juxtaposes this notion to that offered within the wisdom literature. Whilst Aquinas does uphold an intellectual knowing through God in the *eschaton* (offering an exegesis of 1 Corinthians 13: 12), this does not appear to stifle an harmonious participation of creation in divinity from the very act of creation, that must in some sense presuppose the type of communion that God calls humanity into at the *eschaton*.<sup>1198</sup> Fiddes is eager to point out that seeing the world through God’s wisdom is not a form of cosmic mediation, this would imply a ‘totalizing metanarrative’ for Fiddes, and moreover such mediation is not required, given the fact that wisdom is already inherent to the world:

Wisdom does not in any way bridge a gap between transcendence and immanence, between creator and created. Rather, we have seen that the spirit of wisdom which stands over against the world, as its observer is also the *same* spirit which is within the world, holding all things together. We might say that wisdom flows forth from God so that human beings can participate in that same flowing movement.<sup>1199</sup>

One will notice the apparent distinction here between Milbank’s use of the figure of Wisdom and Fiddes’. Milbank categorizes Wisdom’s role in theology as a form of ‘impossible mediation.’ The conclusion that Milbank appears to reach is not that dissimilar from the point that Fiddes is making here. Wisdom is both divine and created, it is impossible insofar as it is utterly paradoxical for Milbank. However the need for paradox and antinomy within Milbank’s Sophiological mediation is to uphold a distinction between God and the world, where both are

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<sup>1196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1197</sup> Ibid, p.205.

<sup>1198</sup> See: Summa Contra Gentiles Bk II:XV.

<sup>1199</sup> Fiddes, *Seeing the World and knowing God*, p.211.

affirmed and distinguished without either collapsing one into the other or creating a dualistic separation. A critical reader of Fiddes might suggest that he does not face the same need for mediation within participation because he does not hold onto a clear and definitive distinction between God and the world (at least in any traditional theological sense), to the extent that both are complex beings. Thus, Fiddes does not need to vouchsafe transcendence within participation for God, which Milbank required. Perhaps greater demand should be placed on Fiddes to distinguish between God and the world. As Milbank attempted to show, this does not need to imply a distant and dualistic conception of God and the world.

Fiddes' conception of seeing the world in wisdom is thoroughly committed to the historical reading of signs in the world which God is as much a part of as creation, and has a similarity to the modern scientific mood.

One should also note the extent to which Fiddes adheres to the biblical concept of Wisdom as a personification of God's relationship to the world. Humanity participates in God through Wisdom.

### **The Place of Wisdom: Participation in God**

Fiddes proposes that, within modernity, presence has been equated with being to devastating effect. Presence represents a totalizing imposition in which difference and locality are subsumed. In response to these threats, philosophers such as Derrida have invoked difference and insisted on a place of 'no-place'; a *chora* (borrowing the phrase from Plato). However, Fiddes is keen to acknowledge the sensitivities of late-modernity, whilst still proposing a place of presence in which God can be found:

These desires for a healthy presence and a satisfying place in the world find their fulfillment, I want to argue, in a relationship with God. Further, despite Derrida's objections to a 'hyper-essential Trinity', I want to maintain that it is the image of the triune God that actually resolves problems of both presence and place. To explore these theological issues I turn to some passages from Israel's wisdom literature which present wisdom as being hidden, and which – in doing so – reflect on the 'place' of wisdom.<sup>1200</sup>

The key to excavating this 'place' is to look at the Hebrew responses to the question of 'where is wisdom to be found?' According to Fiddes the place of wisdom 'is not literally a place at all.

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<sup>1200</sup> Ibid, p.229.

Like the *chora*, it disturbs neat human schemes of control of the world, yet unlike the philosopher's *chora* this 'no place' points towards a real presence of God who is hidden, but not absent, and not inaccessible.<sup>1201</sup> Fiddes claims that:

There is no single place which wisdom inhabits and which human ingenuity could possess. But equally, wisdom is not secluded in a place that only God knows. Divine wisdom is not absolutely transcendent, not totally other from us; God's wisdom is not like a divine agent who dwells remotely in a place in heaven. We can exercise wisdom in tune with God: this is implied in Job 28, and in Ben Sira 1...alongside the riddle of wisdom's place, we discern the shadowy outline of Lady Wisdom who invites us to communion with her.<sup>1202</sup>

In further attempting to elaborate on this notion of a 'no place' that is still in some sense a place where God can be encountered, Fiddes rejects any notion of paradox. As we have already seen, within Milbank's Sophiology, paradox was the crucial concept evoked to prevent total pantheism or complete acosmism; Sophia paradoxically upheld both divine immanence and divine transcendence. According to Fiddes, paradox does not need to be adopted within his Sophiology on the grounds that wisdom designates a place in which God is present yet hidden in a self-limiting or kenotic act. God and creation are not competing for the same place; wisdom's divinity is not at the expense of her humanity; God is present in the place of humanity, precisely because he has withdrawn and hidden himself creating a space within himself for humanity:

Rather than resorting to a paradoxical language of God who is present in absence, I suggest that we should be speaking about a hidden presence of God. In thinking about a God who is present but who veils or conceals God's-self in humility, we might begin to see how we too can be present without oppressing others. Following the paradigm of Job 28 we should look for ways of expressing a space in which we can walk humbly with God's own wisdom, rather than striving to grasp a place where we can simply be secure.<sup>1203</sup>

Thus, Fiddes believes that this approach to wisdom theology allows one to uphold an ethics of mutuality, where competition appears to be quelled. He explores a number of models which maintain the hidden presence of God; including the Kabbalistic notion of divine withdrawal, the medieval mystical idea of encountering God within the soul and the Levinasian notion of experiencing God in the place between a subject and alterity. According to Fiddes, the best way of accounting for these three themes and affirming them together is to put them into a framework of participation within the triune God.

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<sup>1201</sup> Ibid, pp.229-230.

<sup>1202</sup> Ibid, pp.249-250.

<sup>1203</sup> Ibid, p.251.

We have already discussed Fiddes' Trinitarian wisdom theology and noted that its distinguishing feature was to insist on subsistent relations without relating subjects. Building on this idea, Fiddes argues that: 'only a view of divine *hypostasis* as relation sustains the image of 'no-place.'<sup>1204</sup> In his attempt to locate creation within God and grant God's hidden presence within creation, Fiddes maintains that:

Only the idea of divine hypostases as personal relations is an adequate image for the immersion of the whole created universe into God, remembering of course two things. The first is that all language for the mystery of God is analogy and metaphor, and we are looking for the least inadequate language available. The second is that talk of God as an interweaving of relationships is language of participation: it does not attempt objective knowledge of God, but describes what it is like to engage in God.<sup>1205</sup>

How does such a model fit this requirement? Fiddes proposes that:

If we are to experience the world as a place for which we long, a place where we are at home despite its inexhaustibility and multiplicity, we must learn to live in tune with God's wisdom, and so stand in a place which is not literally a place. This is best understood, I am urging, as 'situated' in the space created between the movements of relationship in God. The symbol of the Trinity announces that God has opened up an interval between the interweaving movements of giving and receiving which make up God's own being. The universe exists in this space, which is formed by relationships, and its inhabitants are called to enter more deeply into it.<sup>1206</sup>

Therefore, we have seen to what extent Fiddes' concept of wisdom, based on his biblical exegesis, affirms that the figure represents a place that is saturated with God's presence whilst remaining hidden in a non-oppressive way, which meets the demands of the late-modern mood (suspicious of presence as it is). This hidden place in wisdom was further revelatory of the space created for the world in the intra-divine relationships of the Trinity. The world exists within the space created out of love within God's relationships. From the exegetical analysis in chapter I, we can clearly see to what extent Fiddes' concept of wisdom, as that which conveys God's immanence and transcendence to the world, is clearly indebted and sourced from the biblical account of Wisdom. This can be contrasted with Milbank's paradoxical conception of Wisdom in which he had recourse to a 'fall of Sophia' myth to account for Wisdom's place within creation and within heaven, so common to the Gnostic narrative as seen in chapter II and traced throughout some of the major developments in Western philosophy and Eastern theology.

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<sup>1204</sup> Ibid, p.257.

<sup>1205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1206</sup> Ibid, p.265.

Fiddes' Trinitarian expansion of this wisdom theme appears to be attuned to the sensitivities of the biblical concept of wisdom even if they do go beyond them.

### **Reading the World Through Wisdom**

The late-modern mood, typified by Derridean philosophy, suggests – according to Fiddes – that the world is made up of a never ending flow of signs each deferring meaning to another sign in a seemingly infinite process. This position would imply that God cannot be discerned within the world of signs, if God is supposed to designate some ultimate meaning above the world of signification. Fiddes' task is to discern God within the world of signs without extracting God from this same process:

Our project to discover how an elusive world might witness to a God who is the author of its signs thus inevitably includes the puzzle of the human self. How can we bring together the theological perception that earthly signs are crammed full of the glory of God, with the semiotic perception that signs –together with the self as interpreter and embodiment of signs – are fragile and prone to vanish?<sup>1207</sup>

For Fiddes, the most successful way of reading God from the signs of the world is through the figure of Wisdom:

If God is the final (though collaborative) author of the text of the world, and is present in the text in a hidden way, it is emphatic participation in the movement of the triune God that actually enables us to interpret the signs of the world. The wise of old tell us through the image of Lady Wisdom, an observer like the sun, that to see things properly human interpreters must see as God sees...self-conscious minds can measure, but only because everything is being measured by God...to participate in the measuring of God (Job 28:25) means sharing in the eternal relations of the Trinity, since the love between the Father and the Son in the fellowship of the Spirit is 'the measure of all things.' All interpretation enters into the rhythms of the divine life.<sup>1208</sup>

Therefore, Fiddes conceives of the world as part of the self-communication of God in an other, the place of the world and the way in which the world must be read is through its place within the divine relations of God, God is within this space as a hidden presence, which requires a kenotic act. According to Fiddes, the very 'structure' of the Trinity is kenotic insofar as the relations are for each other. Fiddes follows this theme through to its logical conclusions and affirms (in a manner very typical of Bulgakov's thought and Milbank's Sophiology) that the world is in some sense equi-eternal with God, to the extent that God has never not desired its

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<sup>1207</sup> Ibid, p.286.

<sup>1208</sup> Ibid, p.288.

existence: ‘the affirmation of the eternal will and desire of God provides a strong theological foundation for the idea that the material universe coexists eternally with God, though of course this does not apply to any particular form it takes.’<sup>1209</sup> Like Bulgakov before him, Fiddes then reconceived of the classical doctrine of *creation ex nihilo*, stating that: ‘creation is *ex nihilo*, but only in the sense that it is ultimately ‘from nothing except’ God’s will and love, not in the sense that there ever ‘was nothing except’ God.’<sup>1210</sup>

Therefore we have seen the extent to which Fiddes perceives the world as a text authored by God and therefore revelatory of his hidden presence conceptualized through the figure of Wisdom. The notion that the world and all cultures adhering within it, is revelatory of God is a typical component of the biblical figure of Wisdom. The world was created through and in God’s Wisdom and is therefore present to God and revelatory of his being, yet it is also indicative of his transcendence (hiddenness) in this very presence insofar as this presence cannot fully encapsulate God’s dynamic relational divine life; ideas pertaining to the biblical concept of Wisdom outlined in chapter I. However, the Bulgakovian idea that world is equi-eternal with God does not appear to be sourced from the biblical concept of Wisdom that maintains that the world is created. We shall now explore Fiddes’ reading of localized Wisdom; Wisdom condensed into particular historical and cultural forms.

### **Localized Wisdom**

‘The unsearchable and immeasurable quality of wisdom is now transferred to Torah.’<sup>1211</sup> This remark follows Fiddes’ exegesis of Sirach and is in concordance with the exegetical analysis of this same book in chapter I of this thesis. Fiddes continues: ‘Torah is not portrayed as a cosmic mediator, bridging heaven and earth, but as a unique condensation of wisdom, the vastness of wisdom contracted to a span.’<sup>1212</sup> This claim, that wisdom has been condensed and uniquely expressed within a given culture, raises challenges as to how this culture then relates to other traditions; does it claim superiority, will it degrade neighboring discourses, is this just another totalizing metanarrative? These are the questions that such a claim provokes in late-modernity. However, in response to these issues, Fiddes remarks that:

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<sup>1209</sup> Ibid, p.292.

<sup>1210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1211</sup> Ibid, p.334.

<sup>1212</sup> Ibid, p.335.

The canon of Scripture does create such a requirement [to engage with Scripture], but it is not an obligation to accept the words of the writers of Scripture as correct or infallible: it is to enter into relation with them. It is to stand where they stand, to attempt to enter with empathy into their ‘otherness’, and to hear the word of God in company with them.<sup>1213</sup>

The marking off of a canon or the localizing of Wisdom, does not lead to an isolated body of truth disengaged with the rest of the world but, rather:

The enclosure of a certain body of material by a community should not result in reading it in exclusion from other texts, but always in reading it in relation to others. The notion of a canon obliges us to, not only to explore the material so marked off, but to bring it into conjunction with other territories.<sup>1214</sup>

Fiddes here appears to be drawing on the ‘wisdom theology’ of David Ford. Ford argues that a sapiential approach to scripture inherently demands that it engage with all culture through a universal relationship to wisdom. The outcome of this engagement cannot be determined *a priori* but is unpredictable in nature. What upholds the fruitful nature of this interaction is the faith that all culture is in some sense related to a ‘common’ wisdom:

Nothing can be ruled out as unrelated to scripture and its understanding – no people, history, culture, event, institution, sphere of knowledge or religion. How they might figure in the process of the Spirit leading into all truth is not predictable... The confidence is that the Word is already involved with them.<sup>1215</sup>

This reading of Wisdom is very akin to the concept of Wisdom outlined in chapter I of this thesis. Wisdom is inherently required to engage with surrounding cultures and societies; furthermore, the localization of Wisdom in the Torah for instance (as seen in Sirach) did not appear to dissociate the Wisdom tradition from neighboring cultures (as we later saw in the Wisdom of Solomon). Fiddes appears to be committed to this biblical trend of Wisdom that we analyzed previously. Within the Gnostic tradition, we saw an elitist ideology that believed itself to be legitimized from the mythical and metaphysical origins of those who ‘were in the know’ and encouraged a very different approach to surrounding cultures, one that seemed to be in contradiction to the biblical Wisdom narrative. Following the biblical trend, Fiddes further attempts to contract Wisdom, this time in the figure of Christ – after the pattern of the Early Christian authors.

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<sup>1213</sup> Ibid, p.339.

<sup>1214</sup> Ibid, p.340.

<sup>1215</sup> David Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.57.

### **Fiddes' Wisdom Christology: Wisdom contracted in Christ**

Fiddes contends that 'the New Testament presents Christ as the wisdom of God, replacing the Torah in this function. No longer a book but a person, a bodily text, is the key to the universe (1 Cor. 2:6-10, Col. 1:15-17 with 2:2-4).'<sup>1216</sup> Within the New Testament concept of Wisdom, 'Christ is wisdom contracted to a span.'<sup>1217</sup> Fiddes quoted John's Prologue in support of this position, which we have already concluded is an expression of Wisdom theology in Chapter I. Christ as the embodiment of Wisdom offers access to participate in the divine life of the Trinity; it draws creation and individual persons into this Triune relationship: 'Christ in his body in the world...offers access into the infinite diversity of the triune life of God.'<sup>1218</sup> Fiddes, however, remains concerned about feminist critiques of this localization of Wisdom within a male body. Although he maintains that this particular localization of Wisdom does not exclude the presence of God in the world through all bodies.

As Fiddes tries to further develop this localization of Wisdom in Christ, he suggests that the language of the Chalcedonian Christology of 'two natures' should be abandoned, as its technical philosophical prejudices appear outdated within late-modernity. In its place, Fiddes offers a schema that emphasizes the attunement of Jesus' human relationship to God the Father, that is so perfectly attuned to God's love, that it passes over into the divine relationship between God the Son and God the Father: 'Jesus Christ is thus so perfectly attuned to the love, wisdom, and glory of God that he can be called wisdom itself. But this is not because he is indwelt by some divine wisdom principle. Wisdom is not a divine nature to be added onto a human nature. The relationship of this human son with the one whom he calls Father exactly fits over the relationship in God which is like that between a father and a son.'<sup>1219</sup> This Christological model undoubtedly raises some difficulties that must be briefly addressed. Firstly, the New Testament wisdom writings – both Johanine and Pauline – appear to uphold that Wisdom in God (as the Son) 'descends' and becomes incarnate. There is no explicit mention of a human attuning himself with God through wisdom to the extent that it passes over into a divine relationship. Neither however, does Fiddes' model appear to fit anything that was discerned within the

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<sup>1216</sup> Fiddes, *Seeing the World and knowing God*, p.342.

<sup>1217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1218</sup> Ibid, p.344.

<sup>1219</sup> Ibid, p.389.



Gnostic conception of Wisdom. This appears to be a unique contribution of Fiddes himself. This approach to Christology appears to fit into Fiddes' larger commitments to a 'complex God.' Fiddes' resistance to traditional theism with its apophatic commitment to a God who is distinctly and infinitely other than the world, not being characterized with any finite limitation, would appear to permit a Christology where the divine and human are not definitively distinguished, given the fact that these boundaries are already transgressed from the beginning. And the crux of Fiddes' argument rests on the fact that he believes that God has freely chosen to transgress these boundaries himself, to patiently come to be with the world, participating in history and its suffering. Fiddes further draws out this point in his discussion of Solovyov's and Bulgakov's Sophiology, in which he maintains that God purposefully limits himself. As we have already discussed within this chapter, although this ontology would not satisfy the traditional theist for good reasons, it appears to be congruent with Fiddes' wider argument. Perhaps the more poignant critique to raise here is the extent to which it diverges so markedly from the biblical concept of Wisdom Christology.

The purpose of Fiddes' wisdom theology was to propose a theology that could make sense within a 'late-modern' context. Fiddes believes that the figure of Wisdom allows him to achieve this goal. His own conclusion is worth quoting at length to quantify what Fiddes believes he has offered to the theological community:

Wisdom affirms the life of the body; it is concerned with observation of the world as it is, the recording of patterns of events, and the deduction of guidelines for living from this immersion into practical experience. Wisdom is the art of reading the signs of the world. It exercises this skill, not in an attempt to dominate, but in a humility which is aware of the complexity which undermines neat formulas, and which is open to being disturbed. The wise know that some aspects of the world will always escape explanation and assimilation into harmony. But through this very process of observation there is the possibility of being attuned to a wisdom which invites relationship, emphatic involvement, and a whole way of life. Personified as Lady Wisdom, to be open to her journey through the world is to find oneself in a place which is not a literal place but where one can participate in God's own wisdom. One can know God only through seeing the world. Taking up this Hebrew idea into a Christian wisdom theology, the 'no-place' of wisdom opens into a wide 'space' in which we can participate more fully in the rhythms of the triune God. Thus the movement of wisdom through the world is revealed to have the depth of relational movements of self-giving and other-receiving in love.<sup>1220</sup>

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<sup>1220</sup> Ibid, p.380.

Throughout our assessment of Fiddes' wisdom theology we have critically compared it both to the Gnostic and biblical concepts of Wisdom outlined in chapters I and II as well as to Milbank's Sophiology. We shall now briefly make explicit those elements of his thought that more clearly rectify perceived Gnostic tendencies in Milbank's Sophiology, whilst further offering our own brief suggestions.

### **Fiddes' Wisdom Theology and the Biblical Concept of Wisdom: Supplementing Milbank**

The first major point to draw attention to is the similarities that Fiddes' wisdom theology bares to the biblical concept of Wisdom outlined in chapter I and its disparity, on most occasions, to the Gnostic Sophia. We shall now explore several themes that confirm this conclusion.

Firstly, unlike Milbank - who sourced his Sophiology from the theological proposals of Russian Sophiology – Fiddes bases his wisdom theology very closely on the biblical wisdom texts. In doing this, Fiddes avoids many of the Gnostic themes prevalent in Milbank's suggestions that appeared to arise exclusively from his borrowings from Russian theology and German philosophy.

For Fiddes, following the biblical tradition, Wisdom is a personification of God's relationship to the world. It is not a paradoxical ontology, in which God and creation are both affirmed within the same principle, but rather a harmonious elucidation of God's transcendent (hidden) presence to creation in his immanence.

Furthermore, Fiddes constructs a theological conception of the self in collaboration with both the late-modern mood and the biblical wisdom tradition. As we saw in chapter I, the figure of Wisdom is neither a pure objective reality nor an isolated subject. But hovers somewhere between the two. Fiddes proposes that the human subject must be conceived in a similar way, which avoids a competitive dominating relationship with the world and a nihilistic rejection of subjective identity. The self proposed by Fiddes finds its identity in relating to the world through God as we shall see shortly. This approach again differs from Milbank to the extent that it draws exclusively from the biblical tradition in sympathy with the late-modern context. Whereas Milbank proposed an ontology that was critical and abstracted from the late-modern mood, Fiddes' proposals appear to be more theologically constructive insofar as there is a clear dialogue established between the wider community and the theological community.

This tendency to engage and borrow from surrounding cultures was shown to be an indispensable tendency within the biblical wisdom tradition. The biblical concept of Wisdom was constructed out of the circumstances that the Hebrew community found itself in during its exile. It liberally borrowed and engaged with Oriental culture and Hellenized ideas in order to construct its concepts. Fiddes appears to embody this trait throughout his wisdom theology, constantly engaging with his surrounding culture: philosophical, scientific and theological.

Fiddes adopts a natural theology that is deeply indebted to the biblical wisdom tradition. According to the analysis in chapter I, the world was created in and through Wisdom. Therefore, the entirety of the world must witness to God in some sense – this is perhaps why those adhering to this tradition actively seek wisdom in neighboring traditions. Such a creation theology necessarily encourages ecumenical and interfaith dialogue. This was seen in Chapter I, when the Jewish writers entered into dialogue with Egyptian theology and Greek philosophy. This has also been discovered in Fiddes' thought. In contradiction to this tendency, Gnostic wisdom theology considered itself to be superior to the world and its diverse discourses, to the extent in which it believed that it was the only true representation of the original divinity.

Whereas Milbank, after the pattern of Solovyov and Bulgakov, broke with the biblical concept of Wisdom insofar as it was localized/incarnated first within the Torah and then ultimately within Jesus Christ, in preference of a metaphysical Wisdom as a cosmic mediator, Fiddes follows the logic of the biblical development of Wisdom to include these localizations. Although Fiddes seeks to insist on the historical incarnation of Christ, we argued that certain tendencies in his thought, that resulted in him proposing a complex God, could jeopardize the ultimate reality of the incarnation, however this could easily be rectified by adhering to a traditional theistic concept of God.

Fiddes also upheld that the world participates in God through Wisdom, which was shown to be a crucial tenet of the biblical concept of Wisdom; although Fiddes elaborates this theme to locate it within a properly Trinitarian idiom.

### **Summative Remarks**

Within this chapter we have explored two major proponents of wisdom theology within contemporary British theology; namely, Milbank's Sophiology and Fiddes' wisdom theology.

Having critically analyzed both on their own merit, in relation to each other and in comparison to the two concepts of Wisdom outlined in chapters I and II (both biblical and Valentinian) it was argued that Milbank's Sophiology bore clear evidence that the Gnostic concept of Wisdom had emerged within modern theology. Although other prevalent themes informed the construction of Milbank's Sophiological suggestions, there were clearly strong indications of the Valentinian narrative, most notably in its resistance to a clearly defined historical incarnation, an emphasis on the salvific effect of knowledge, and its tendencies to branch into mythology. Fiddes' wisdom theology was demonstrated to be a clear continuation of the biblical wisdom tradition and his concept of Wisdom was directly indebted to the biblical concept outlined in chapter I. Fiddes' wisdom suggestions were not without their own difficulties, which were discussed above, yet overall it could be seen as providing a correction to some of the Gnostic tendencies within Milbank's Sophiology. The fact that Milbank's Sophiology was sourced from an historical lineage that was archaeologically discovered to be directly related to the ancient Gnostic tradition (Russian Sophiology and German idealism) indicates that Gnosticism has had a significant influence on modern systems of thought. We have demonstrated its influence in modern philosophical and theological discourses that traverse different periods of history. The fact that Fiddes' wisdom theology is not sourced from this lineage and provides no clear evidence of Gnostic theology is further indicative of this conclusion. This thesis set out with the intention of discovering whether ancient Gnosticism played any significant role in the development of modern systems of thought, by focusing this question through the lens of a particular theological theme; namely Sophiology, it should now hopefully be clear to the reader the extent to which this claim is verified through the study of this thesis.

## **General Summation**

The specific arguments of this thesis have been summarized and concluded throughout the development of the arguments themselves; pausing to reflect and conclude at every juncture within the thesis. In order to prevent unnecessary repetition, only the major findings of this thesis shall briefly be highlighted along with a short consideration of further possibilities for this research.

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate, broadly utilizing Foucault's archaeological methodology, the influence of Gnosticism on modern systems of thought through the theological theme of Sophiology (the reasons that this discourse were adopted for this task were outlined comprehensively within the introduction). Firstly, the thesis produced a concept of the biblical Wisdom figure as a distinct unity of discourse within an authoritative enunciation filed through extensive biblical scholarship. This same process was carried out for the Valentinian concept of Wisdom. After critically comparing them and noting similarities and distinctions, it was concluded that two definitively separate unities of discourse and concepts of Wisdom could be distinguished and outlined and that these could be named biblical and Valentinian respectively. It was necessary to propose these models in order to analyze later discourses that may emerge from similar patterns or circumstances or even propose similar concepts as those found within the two unities of discourse just mentioned.

Following the insights of Baur, Voegelin and O'Regan, this thesis then sought to identify the historical, cultural and philosophical setting which permitted a particular discourse on wisdom to emerge within modernity. By closely investigating the development of post-Kantian idealism, it was discovered that a very particular set of philosophical problems emerged within this discourse that could be identified to patterns within the Gnostic discourse that produced their particular concept of Wisdom. These philosophical questions did produce a rudimentary Gnostic narrative within Fichte's Jena philosophy. Although these discourses are historically disparate, the archaeological method of the thesis enabled this fruitful comparison.

The thesis then traced these archaeologically shifted 'Valentinian' philosophical problems into their next historical manifestation in the philosophy of Schelling. Adopting and answering these issues, it was shown that Schelling produced a philosophy that was archaeologically concluded

to be a modification of earlier Gnostic discourses on Wisdom. Not only had Schelling engaged with those problems that produced a particular discourse on Wisdom within the second century, but going further than Fichte, he actually adopted their concepts in order to give expression to his own philosophical thought.

From these two chapters alone, the central argument of the thesis (that Valentinian Gnosticism has played a significant role in the construction of certain important modern systems of thought) could be confirmed. Yet our archaeological journey did not stop there.

In further following the historical development of this particular discourse, we were led to the 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian theologians: Solovyov and Bulgakov, both of whom adopted and transposed Schellingian philosophy into theology more comprehensively than any other theologians to date. In doing so, many of the Gnostic patterns of thought identified in Schelling became apparent within the theological systems of these two theologians. Both Solovyov and Bulgakov expressed this theology through the figure of Wisdom. The major question that this chapter sought to explore, utilizing the research in chapters I and II, was just which concept of Wisdom were they proposing. Through extensive study of their respective theologies it was concluded that both theologians had produced Valentinian concepts of Wisdom that could clearly be distinguished from its biblical counterpart. The significance of these findings were that Russian Sophiology, was in many respects, the model that introduced wisdom theology to modern British theology, which we went on to discuss in the final chapter of the thesis.

We studied the wisdom theologies of both Milbank and Fiddes as they were considered to have produced the most comprehensive instances of contemporary wisdom theology. We began by critically engaging with Milbank's Sophiology, where we noted a plethora of levels of influences and questions that Milbank was attempting to respond to; both biblical, philosophical, political and cultural. Despite the extensiveness of Milbank's range, we did detect a distinctly Gnostic influence on his Sophiology and that it resembled the Valentinian concept of Wisdom more closely than it did the biblical figure of Wisdom. The predominant argument for this was because Milbank had sourced his concept of Wisdom from Russian Sophiology. This conclusion gave further credence to the accuracy of the archaeological findings of the previous chapters. Therefore, although Milbank's wisdom theology cannot be encapsulated entirely within the Gnostic discourse, given the fact of the range of other influences on his thought that were

discussed in chapter VI, nevertheless an influence of Gnosticism could easily be discerned, therefore corroborating the principal argument of this thesis that contended that Gnosticism has influenced modern systems of thought, both philosophical and theological. However, we then attempted to contour these Gnostic tendencies within Milbank's concept of Wisdom by supplementing his suggestions with the wisdom theology of Fiddes, which after close analysis was considered to be archaeologically related to the biblical concept of Wisdom. This appeared to be a step worth taking given the potential that wisdom theology has to engage with modern scientific discourses and cultural theories in a constructive way, as Fiddes demonstrated. Furthermore, biblical wisdom theology has always proven itself to be obliged to engage with surrounding cultures and ideas which seems to offer the study of theology a significant place within the modern world. Areas of Fiddes' thought were critically modified and compared to those of Milbank's, but overall his concept of Wisdom was concluded to be a significant adaption of the biblical concept that could supplement Milbank's Sophiology at points when it slipped into the Gnostic lineage.

The only thing left to briefly discuss is some of the implications that this thesis has for further scholarship within this field. One of the major discoveries within this study was the extent to which German idealism is influenced by Gnostic mythology (especially Schellingian thought). Therefore, its influential relationship to theology may need to be reconsidered. Furthermore, Sophiology was just one of the significant lens through which this study could have been conducted. Many other theologies are heavily indebted to the German philosophical tradition and could perhaps offer potential avenues of inquiry to see whether Gnostic mythology could illuminate these discourses. Two significant theologians of the twentieth century suggest themselves, namely Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar in particular.

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